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SERMONS

ON

SEVERAL SUBJECTS.

BY THE RIGHT REVEREND

BEILBY PORTEUS, D. D.

BISHOP OF LONDON.

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TO THE KING.

SIR,

THE only grounds on which I can presume to entreat Your Majesty's favorable acceptance of this Volume of Sermons are, that a great part of them was preached in Your own Royal Chapel at St. James' ; and that my intention in publishing them was to serve (as far as a situation of much labor and little leisure would allow) the cause of that holy religion, to which Your Majesty has ever approved Yourself a sincere and cordial friend. An intention of this sort, however feebly executed, will, I am persuaded, be considered by Your Majesty as the best and most becoming return I can make, for those spontaneous marks of Your goodness to me, which have impressed the warmest sentiments of gratitude on the mind of,

SIR

YOUR MAJESTY'S

Most humble

and most dutiful

Subject, and Servant,

B. CHESTER.

(RECAP)

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SERMON I.

MARK xii. 30.

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. This is the first commandment.

THE LOVE OF GOD, so forcibly inculcated in this and other passages of Scripture, is a sentiment purely evangelical; and is one of those many peculiar circumstances which so eminently distinguish the doctrines of the gospel from the dry unanimated precepts of the ancient heathen moralists. We never hear *them* urging the love of God, as a necessary part of human duty, or as a proper ground of moral obligation. Their religion being merely ceremonial and political, never pretended to reach the heart, or to inspire it with any sincerity or warmth of affection towards the Deity. Indeed how was it possible to have any love for such gods as they worshipped: for gods debased with every human weakness, and polluted with every human vice? It was enough surely to make the people worship such a crew. To have insisted upon their loving them too, would have exceeded all bounds of modesty and common sense. But Christianity having given us an infinitely great and good and holy God to worship, very naturally requires from us the purest and devoutest sentiments of affection towards him; and with great justice makes the love of our Maker an indispensible

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requisite in religion, and the grand fundamental duty of a Christian. Surely then it concerns us to enquire carefully into the true nature of it. And it concerns us the more, because it has been unhappily brought into disrepute by the extravagant conceits of a few devout enthusiasts concerning it. Of these, some have treated the love of God in so mystical and refined a way, and carried it to such heights of seraphic ecstasy and rapture, that common minds must for ever despair either of following or understanding them; whilst others have described it in such warm and indelicate terms, as are much better suited to the grossness of earthly passion, than the purity of spiritual affection. And what is still more deplorable, the love of God has been sometimes made the scourge of man; and it has been thought that the most effectual way to please the Creator, was to persecute and torment and destroy his creatures. Hence the irreligious and profane have taken occasion to treat all pretence to piety as fanatical or insincere; and even many of the worthier part of mankind have been afraid of giving way to the least warmth of devout affection towards the great Author of their being. But let not the sincere Christian be scared out of his duty by such vain terrors as these. The accidental excesses of this holy sentiment can be no just argument against its general excellence and utility. As the finest intellects are most easily disordered and overset; so the more generous and exalted our affections are, the more liable are they to be perverted and depraved. We know that even friendship itself has sometimes been abused to the most unworthy purposes, and led men to the commission of the most atrocious crimes. Shall we therefore utterly discard that generous passion, and consider it as nothing more than the unnatural fervor of a romantic imagination! Every heart revolts against so wild a thought. And why then must we suffer the love of God to be banished out of the world because it has been sometimes improperly represented, or indiscreetly exercised? It is not either from the visionary

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mystic, the sensual fanatic, or the frantic zealot, but from the plain word of God, that we are to take our ideas of this divine sentiment. There we find it described in all its native purity and simplicity. The marks by which it is there distinguished contain nothing enthusiastic or extravagant. The chief test by which the gospel orders us to try and measure our love to God is, *the regard we pay to his commands.* "He "that hath my commandments, and keepeth them," says our Lord, "he it is that loveth me."* "This is "the love of God," says St. John, "that we keep his "commandments."† And again, in still stronger terms: "Whoso keepeth God's word, in him verily "is the love of God *perfected.*"‡ Had a proper attention been paid to such passages as these, we should have heard nothing of those absurd reveries which have so much disgraced this doctrine. Yet, while we thus guard against the errors of over-strained pietism, let us take care that we fall not into the opposite extreme of a cold and cautious indifference; that, as others have raised their notions of this excellent quality too high, we, on the other hand, sink them not too low. Because the Scriptures say, that to keep the commandments of God, is to love God, therefore too many are willing to conclude that no degree of inward affection need accompany our outward obedience; and that all appearance of devout ardor is a suspicious and even dangerous symptom. But this notion is to the full as groundless and unscriptural as those abovementioned; and needs no other confutation than the very words of the text. We are commanded not merely to *love* God, but to love him *with all our heart, and soul, and mind, and strength.* Since then our *obedience* must be, as we have seen, the measure of our *love*, we are plainly bound by this command to *obey* him also with all our heart, and soul, and mind, and strength; that is, with zeal, with alacrity, with vigor, with perseverance, with the united force of all our faculties and powers, with one universal bent of the

* John xiv. 21. † 1 John v. 3. ‡ 1 John ii. 5.

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whole man towards God. The love of our Maker, then, is neither a mere unmeaning animal fervor, nor a lifeless formal worship or obedience. It consists in devoutness of heart, as well as purity of life; and from a comparison of the text with other passages of Scripture, we may define it to be, "such a reverential admiration of God's perfections in general, and such a grateful sense of his infinite goodness in particular, as render the contemplation and the worship of him delightful to us; and produce in us a constant desire and endeavor to please him in every part of our moral and religious conduct."

This it is that the Scriptures mean by the love of God; and it is nothing more than what every man may, if he pleases, very easily acquire. It is not a new perception, of which we never experienced any thing before; it is not an unintelligible, mysterious, or supernatural impression upon the soul: it is only a purer degree of that very same affection, which we frequently entertain for some of the most worthy of our own species. This sentiment religion finds already existing in our minds, and all that it does is to give it a new direction, and to turn it upon God, as its highest and properest and most adequate object. If then we wish to know still more clearly in what the love of God consists; and what share of it we ourselves possess; we must consult our own breasts, and consider a little how we feel ourselves affected towards the eminently great and good among our fellow creatures. Now, when we observe any one of this character going on steadily and uniformly in one regular even course of upright, noble, disinterested, benevolent conduct, making it the chief study and business of his life to promote the comfort and happiness of every human being within his reach; we can no more help esteeming and loving and reverencing so excellent a person, than we can forbear desiring food when we are hungry; even though we ourselves are not in the least benefited by his goodness. But, should we be so fortunate as to live under his influence, and to be *interested*

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in his virtues; to have him for our friend, our benefactor; our parent, guardian, governor, or protector; then it is scarce possible for language to express the emotions of affection, gratitude, and delight, which we feel in contemplating his goodness, and even in the very mention of his name. In cases like this (and such cases do, God be thanked, sometimes exist) how does our heart *burn within us*, how restless and impatient are we, till we find some better way than that of words to express the sense we have of our benefactor's kindness towards us? With what solicitude do we study every turn of his countenance, and endeavor to prevent his very wishes? We not only do what he desires, but we do it with alacrity and ardor. We love to speak of him, to think of him, to converse with him, to imitate him. We never mention him but in terms of reverence and respect. We are jealous of his reputation; we cannot bear to hear it lightly treated. We enter heartily into his interests, and adopt his sentiments. We love what he loves, we hate what he hates, we are ready for his sake to do any thing, to relinquish any thing, to suffer any thing. These are the sentiments we entertain, and this the conduct we observe towards those that we love on earth; and in this manner does Christianity expect us to love our Father that is in heaven. If this sincerity and ardor of affection are justly esteemed both natural and laudable in the one case, why are they not at least equally so in the other? Why may they not without any stretch of our faculties, or any imputation of hypocrisy or enthusiasm, be exercised towards Him, who is the very perfection of every thing that is great and good; who is in reality, and in the strictest sense, our friend and benefactor, our parent, guardian, protector, and governor all in one? It is true, indeed, there is one difference, and that, as some think, a very material one, between the two cases. Our earthly friends are *seen*, our heavenly one is *unseen*. But who will pretend to say that we can have no love for those whom we have never seen? Do we not often conceive the highest regard and ven-

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eration for the worthies of past ages, whom we know only by the portraits that history draws of them? And even with respect to persons of distinguished excellence in our own times: it is not always necessary that we should see in order to love them. It is enough that we feel that they are present with us, by that most pleasing and convincing of all proofs, the benefits they confer upon us. Now we know that God is every where present; that, "he is not far from every "one of us;" that in him we most literally "live, "and move, and have our being." Though we see not *him*, yet his kindness and bounty to us we see and feel every moment of our lives: and the invisibility of the giver is amply compensated by the inestimable value of his gifts. By him we were first brought into being; by his power that being is continually upheld; by his mercy in Christ Jesus we are redeemed from sin and misery; by his grace we are excited to every thing that is good; by his providence we are hourly protected from a multitude of unseen dangers and calamities; to his bounty we owe the various comforts and delights that surround us here, and the provision that is made for our everlasting happiness hereafter. Is it possible now to receive such favors as these, without sometimes thinking of them; or to think of them without being filled with love and gratitude towards the gracious Author of them? If they affect us at all, they must affect us strongly and powerfully. For, although the love of God is not a sudden start of passion; but a sober, rational, religious sentiment, acquired by reflection, and improved by habit; yet, as I before observed, it must not be so *very* rational as to exclude *all* affection; it may, and it ought to produce in us a steady and uniform, a sedate yet fervent sense of gratitude towards God; exerting itself in acts of adoration and praise, and substantialized in the practice of every Christian virtue.

Have you then (ask your own hearts), have you ever given these practical, these only decisive proofs, that you really love God, as the text requires you to do,

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with all your heart, and soul, and mind, and strength? Have you made his precepts the first and principal object of your care, and pursued other things only in subordination to that great concern? Have you not only admired and adored his perfections, but, as far as the infirmity of your nature, and the infinite distance between God and man would allow, endeavored to imitate them? Have you delighted to think and to speak of him, and never thought or spoke of him, but with the utmost veneration and awe? When you have heard his holy name profaned, or seen any of his ordinances or laws insulted, have you always felt and expressed a proper abhorrence of such unworthy behavior? Have you sacredly observed that holy day which is set apart for his service, and not only attended public worship yourselves, but taken care that all under your roof and under your protection should do the same? Have you brought up your children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*;" and amidst all the fine accomplishments, amidst all the prudent maxims with which you have furnished them, have you taught them that "wisdom which is from above," and formed them to shine in *another* world as well as this? Have you gladly seized all opportunities of conversing with your Maker in private and in domestic prayer; of pouring out your soul before him on all occasions, whether of sorrow or of joy, intreating pardon for your offences, and imploring his assistance for your future conduct? Have you for his sake been content sometimes not only to forego many worldly comforts and advantages, but even, if necessary, to encounter ridicule, reproach, and injurious treatment? Have you cheerfully sacrificed to his service, when called upon, your health and your repose, your amusements and pursuits, your favorite passions and your fondest wishes, the pleasures of youth, the ambition of manhood, the avarice of old age? Have you borne with patience and resignation all the disappointments, losses and afflictions, that have befallen you? Have you considered them as the corrections of

* Ephesians vi. 4.

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his fatherly hand, and submitted without a murmur to all the dispensations of his providence? Have you, in fine, entirely subdued all anxious and fretful thoughts about your temporal affairs, and acquired that absolute composure and serenity of mind in every condition of life, which nothing but religion can give, and nothing but guilt can take away; committing yourselves and all your concerns to the great Disposer of every human event; with a perfect confidence in his infinite wisdom and goodness, and a firm persuasion that every thing will work together ultimately for your good?

By questions such as these it is that you must try and examine yourselves whether you really love God or not. In all this there is nothing visionary or fanatical, nothing but what the coolest heads and the calmest spirits may easily rise to, nothing but what reason approves and the gospel enjoins, nothing but what we ourselves should in a proportionable degree require from those who pretend to have a sincere regard and affection for us. What answers *you* can give to these questions your own consciences can best tell. But what a very great part of mankind can say to them, one may but too well imagine. Some there are, who, far from having any love for God, affect to doubt his very existence, and professedly make a jest of every thing that looks like religion. Others, immersed in the pursuits of pleasure, of interest, of ambition, have no time to waste upon their Maker, and hardly know whether they believe a God or not. And even of those who profess both to believe and to reverence him, how few are there that know any thing of that inward and hearty love for him which leads to universal holiness of life? If they maintain an external *decency* of conduct, are just in their dealings, and generous to their friends, they think that all is well, and that they are in the high road to salvation. All their notions of duty terminate in *themselves*, or their *fellow creatures*, and they seem to have no apprehensions of any peculiar homage or service being due to their *Creator*. They can therefore, without any remorse of conscience, make a wanton and irreverent use

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of his holy name; in oaths and execrations, which can answer no other purpose but that of insulting God, and giving pain to every serious mind. Not content with the ample provision of six days out of seven for their business and amusement, they must have the seventh too, or they are undone. They grudge their Maker even that slender pittance of time which he has reserved to himself; they prostitute the whole, or the greater part of it, to the most trifling or most unworthy purposes; and think it much fitter that he should be robbed of his worship than they of their pleasures and pursuits for a day, or even for an hour. Much less can they afford to spend a few minutes every day in *private* meditation and prayer; and as to *family devotion*, it would, they think, absolutely ruin their character, and expose them to everlasting contempt. Or if by chance they do go so far as to worship God both in public and at home, yet with what visible languor, and coldness, and indifference, do they often labor through this heavy task; and how apt are they to deride and stigmatize with opprobrious names those who show any unusual marks of seriousness and devotion? They think it a dreadful crime to be *righteous over-much*, but none at all to be righteous over-little. They are terribly afraid of being called bigots and enthusiasts; but think there is no danger of falling into the opposite extreme, of lukewarmness and want of piety. They profess perhaps sometimes, and perhaps too persuade themselves, that they really love God; but they give no demonstrative proof that their persuasion is well-grounded, and their professions sincere. If they have the *form* of godliness, they too commonly want the *power* of it. Their piety is in general exterior and local, confined to the ordinary offices of devotion, and the walls of a church; not considering that God is equally present every where; that the whole world is his temple, and the sanctity of our whole lives his worship. But *their* lives are consecrated to far other purposes. Their affections are not set on things above, their views do not tend there, their hopes are not centered there, "their

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" treasure is on earth, and there is their heart also." The main end, the great and ultimate aim, of all their actions and designs, is not to please GOD, but to please *themselves;* to advance their power, to enlarge their fortunes, to multiply their amusements. Their love of God is only secondary, and subservient to these primary considerations; just as much as is *commodious* and *easy*, and consistent with all their favorite pursuits. Satisfied with " eschewing evil," they do not go on " to do the thing that is good;" they do not press forwards towards those sublime and exalted virtues, that preference of God to every worldly consideration, that entire resignation to the divine will, that perfect trust and reliance upon Heaven, which are the surest proof, and the fairest fruit, of true genuine piety. In prosperity, their hearts are lifted up, and they forget God; in adversity, they are cast down, and dare not look up to him. Or if, when misfortunes press hard upon them, they are at length brought down upon their knees before him; yet this is commonly an act of fear rather than of love, of necessity rather than of choice; after experiencing what every human being will experience in his turn, the instability of worldly happiness, and the weakness of every earthly support.

What then can be said for those who fall under this description, and what excuse can they make for the neglect of so important a duty? For, whatever they may think of it, however lightly in the gaiety of their hearts they may treat the love of their Maker, yet it is confessedly the FIRST AND GREAT COMMAND, and stands at the head of every Christian virtue. If you ask, *why* it is thus distinguished, the answer is obvious. It is plainly reasonable and right; it is conformable to all our ideas of order and propriety, that the Supreme Lord of All, the *first* and greatest and best of Beings, should have the *first* place in our regards, and that those duties which respect him as their immediate object, should have the precedency and command over every other. But besides this natural fitness, there is another very important reason why the love of God is called in

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the Gospel the FIRST AND GREAT COMMAND. And that is, because among all the incentives to virtue, it is the only one whose operation is sufficiently effectual and extensive, the only one that can reach to every instance of duty, and produce an uniform, consistent character of goodness. It is *the grand, leading principle of right conduct*, the original source and fountain from which all Christian graces flow; from whence the "living waters" of religion take their rise, and branch out into all the various duties of human life. Other motives may *frequently* lead us to what is right. Instinct, constitution, prudence, convenience, a strong sense of honor and of moral rectitude, will in *many* cases prompt us to worthy actions; but in *all* cases they will not, especially in those of great danger, and difficulty, and self-denial; whereas the love of God, if it be hearty and sincere, will equally regulate the *whole* of our conduct; will, on the most delicate and trying occasions, engage us to renounce our dearest interests and strongest inclinations, when conscience and duty require it at our hands. A man without any religion at all may do good *occasionally*, may act laudably *by chance*; his virtue may break out sometimes in sudden temporary gleams; but whoever wishes to be habitually and uniformly good, must have the vital principle of piety working at his heart, and by a constant, regular warmth producing constant and regular fruits of righteousness.

Let not then either the sober moralist, or the gay man of the world, any longer treat this most holy affection with derision and contempt, as a mere ideal, unintelligible notion, fit only for the cloystered monk, or the superstitious devotee. It is, on the contrary, one of the most useful, one of the most practical sentiments belonging to our nature, adapted no less to active than to contemplative life, and entirely calculated to promote all the great purposes of social happiness and universal good. This is not a time, God knows, for weakening any of those ties, which bind men down to their duty, much less for dissolving that strongest of all bonds, affectionate allegiance to the great Soverign of the uni-

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verse ; which, as the Scripture expresses it, *constrains* us to every thing that is right and good, from this powerful, this irresistible motive ; because the author of our being, the author of every blessing we enjoy, demands it from us, a proof of our gratitude, as the best, the only return we can make to his unbounded goodness. Without this, every system of ethics, however specious or plausible it may seem in theory, will be found on trial imperfect and ineffectual. And it is one of the many invaluable benefits we owe to the Gospel ; that by the addition of this *governing principle*, *this master affection*, to all the other grounds of moral obligation, it has given virtue every assistance that heaven and earth can furnish ; it has given *us* the completest and most efficacious rule of conduct that was ever offered to mankind.

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SERMON II.

JOHN iii. 19.

This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

WHEN the several parts of the text are reduced to their proper order; they give us the four following distinct propositions.

That light is come into the world.

That men have preferred darkness to this light.

That the reason is because their deeds are evil.

And that the consequence of this choice will be condemnation.

It may be worth our while to bestow a little consideration on each of these particulars.

In this enlightened age, it will be thought no paradox to assert that "light is come into the world." The position is true in more senses than one; but there is only one that can suit this passage. The light here meant can be no other than that divine one of revelation, which "brought life and immortality*" along with it. The Christian dispensation is constantly and uniformly described in holy writ under this figure, from the time that the first faint glimmerings of it appeared at a distance, till it shone forth in its full lustre and glory under the Gospel. Indeed there seems to

* 2 Tim. i. 10.

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be scarce any other image that could so fitly and adequately represent it to us. It is of the same use to the spiritual, that the light of the sun is to the natural world. It gives life, health, and vigor, to God's new creation; it makes the "day of salvation*" to dawn upon us; it opens to us the prospect of another and a better life; "it is a light to our feet and a lantern to our "paths†," and guides us in the way to happiness and glory.

The next assertion contained in the text, that "men "have preferred darkness to this light," may seem to require a proof. To "love darkness rather than light" is so opposite to our nature, so inconsistent with our general manner of proceeding, that it seems at first incredible. If it really is the case, so perverse a choice was never made but in religion. Every other kind of light men catch at with the utmost eagerness. The light of the heavens has been ever esteemed one of the greatest blessings that Providence has bestowed upon us, without which, even life itself would be hardly thought worth possessing. The love of knowledge, that light of the mind, appears in us as early, and operates in us as strongly, as any one principle in our nature; and, in every instance, the human understanding naturally lays hold on every opportunity of information, and opens itself on every side to let in all the light it is capable of receiving.

How then comes it to pass that with a mind thus constituted, thus thirsting after light, men can sometimes bring themselves to do such violence to their nature, as to chuse darkness, in that very point where it is of the utmost importance to have all the light they can possibly get; where every step must lead to happiness or misery, and every error draw after it the most fatal and lasting consequences? Yet our Saviour tells us, that this was actually the case in his days, and would God that daily experience did not show the possibility of it, in our own! But when we see the various artifices with which revelation is every day assailed; when

* 2 Cor. vi. 2. † Psal. cxix. 105.

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we see one man * most ingeniously reasoning us out of every ground of certainty, and every criterion of truth; involving self-evident axioms in obscurity and confusion; and entangling our understandings in the gloomy intricacies of scholastic subtilty and metaphysical abstraction; when we see another† exhausting all the powers of a most fertile genius in ridiculing the dispensations of the God that gave it; making the most awful subjects of religion the constant sport of his licentious wit; and continuing to sit with unabated levity in "the seat of the scorner," till he drops from it into the grave; when we see a third‡, with the strongest professions of sincerity, and good faith, proposing most humbly what he calls his *doubts* and *scruples*, and thereby creating them in the minds of others; extolling one part of Christianity in order to subvert the rest; retaining its moral precepts; but rejecting its miracles and all its characteristic doctrines; giving an air of speciousness to the wildest singularities by the most exquisite graces of composition, and insidiously undermining the foundations of the Gospel, while he pretends to defend it: when, I say, our adversaries assume such different shapes, and set so many engines at work against us; what else can this mean but to take from us all the sources of religious information, and bring us back again to the darkness and ignorance of our Pagan ancestors? It is to no purpose to tell us here of the *light of nature*. It is an affront to our senses, to offer us that dim taper, in the room of the "sun of righteousness¶." Whatever may be said (and a great deal has been said) of the modern improvements of science, the discoveries of philosophy, and the sagacity of human reason, it is to revelation only we are indebted for the superior light we now

* HUME; whose uncomfortable and unintelligible system of Pyrrhonism has been exposed with great spirit and eloquence in DR. BEATTIE'S *Essay on the nature and immutability of Truth*: in which (as well as in all the other productions of the same excellent writer) the reader will find that union so rarely to be met with, of a clear head, a fine imagination, a correct taste, and a heart thoroughly warmed with the love of truth and virtue.

† VOLTAIRE. ‡ ROUSSEAU. ¶ Mal. iv. 2.

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boast of in religion*. If nature could ever have pointed out to us right principles of belief, and rules of conduct, she might have done it long ago; she had four thousand years to do it in before the coming of Christ. But what little progress was made in this vast space of time; what egregious mistakes were committed, not only in the speculative doctrines of religion, but in some of the most essential points of practical morality, I need not remind you. How comes it then to pass, that this blind guide is at last become so quick-sighted? How comes her eye on a sudden so strong and clear, as to see into the perfections and will of God, to penetrate into the dark regions of futurity, to take in at one view the whole compass of our duty, and the whole extent of our existence? It is plain some friendly hand must have removed the film from her eyes; and what other hand could this be than that gracious and beneficent one, which gave eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame; which helped the impotence, and healed the infirmity, of nature in every instance, in none more than in this? It is in short from the sacred sources of the Gospel, that reason drew that light she now enjoys. Let then men walk, if they *will* be so perverse, "BY THIS LESSER "LIGHT†," which was only intended "to rule the "night‡" of heathenism; but let them be so honest as to confess that it is only a *borrowed*, a *reflected* light; that it owes much the greatest part of its present lustre to THAT GREATER, THAT BETTER LIGHT of the Gospel, whose province it is "to govern the day¶," and to lighten every "man that cometh into the "world**."

Let us however suppose for a moment (what can never be proved) that mankind are now much better able to investigate truth, and to find out their duty by themselves, than they were in former ages; and that reason can give us (the utmost it ever did or can pre-

* Mr. Rousseau himself confesses, that all the fine morality displayed in some of our modern publications, is derived not from philosophy, but from the Gospel. VOL. ix. p. 71.

† Gen. i. 16 ‡ Ib. ¶ Ib. ** Joh. i. 9.

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tend *to* give) a perfect system of morality. But what *will* this avail us, unless it could be shown that *man* is also perfect and uncorrupt? A religion that contained nothing more than a perfect system of morality might perhaps suit an angel: but it is only one part, it is only a subordinate part, of the religion of a man and a sinner. It would be but very poor consolation to a criminal going to execution, to put into his hands a complete collection of the laws of his country, when the poor wretch perhaps expected a reprieve. It could serve no other purpose than to embitter his agonies, and make him see more clearly the justice of his condemnation. If you chose to do the unhappy man a real service, and to give him any substantial comfort, you must assure him that the offence for which he was going to die was forgiven him; that his sentence was reversed; that he would not only be restored to his prince's favor, but put into a way of preserving it for the future; and that if his conduct afterwards was honest and upright, he should be deemed capable of enjoying the highest honors in his master's kingdom. But no one *could* tell him this, or at least he would credit no one that did; except he was commissioned and authorised by the prince himself, to tell him so. He might study the laws in his hands till the very moment of his execution, without ever finding out from them that he should obtain a pardon.

Such, the Scriptures inform us, was the state of man before Christ came into the world. He had fallen from his original innocence. He was a rebel against God, and obnoxious to his wrath. The sentence of death had passed upon him, and he had no plea to offer to arrest the execution of it. Reason, you say, gives him a perfect rule to walk by. But he has already transgressed this rule; and if even this transgression were cancelled, yet if left to himself, he may transgress it again the next moment. He is uneasy under his sentence, he wants forgiveness for the past, assistance for the future; and till you can give him this, it is an insult upon his misery to talk to him of a per-

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fect rule of action. If this be all that reason can give him (and it is really much more than it can give him) he must necessarily have recourse to Revelation. God only knows, and God only can tell, whether he *will* forgive, and upon what *terms* he will forgive the offences done against him; what mode of worship he requires; what helps he will afford us; and what condition he will place us in hereafter. All this God actually *has* told us in the Gospel. It was to tell us this, He sent his Son into the world, whose mission was confirmed by the highest authority, by signs from Heaven, and miracles on earth; whose life and doctrine are delivered down to us by the most unexceptionable witnesses, who sealed their testimony with their blood; who were too curious and incredulous to be themselves imposed upon, too honest and sincere, too plain and artless, to impose upon others.

What then can be the reason that men still refuse to see, and persist in "loving darkness rather than light?" They will tell you, perhaps, that it is because the Gospel is full of incredible mysteries; but our Saviour tells you, and he tells you much truer, that it is "because "their deeds are evil." The mysteries and difficulties of the Gospel can be no real objection to any man that considers what mysteries occur, and what insuperable objections may be started, in almost every branch of human knowledge; and how often we are obliged, in our most important temporal concerns, to decide and to act upon evidence, incumbered with far greater difficulties than any that are to be found in Scripture. If we can admit no religion that is not free from mystery, we must, I doubt, be content without any religion at all. Even the religion of nature itself, the whole constitution both of the natural and the moral world, is full of mystery*; and the greatest mystery of all would be, if, with so many irresistible marks of truth, Christianity should at last prove false. It is not then because the Gospel has *too little* light for these men that

* Vide *Voltaire, Questions sur l'Encyclopedia*, V. i. p. 190. *Rousseau*, T. 7. p. 176. & T. 8. p. 17, 26, 32, 49—12°, 1762, *Francfort*.

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they reject it, but because it has *too much*. "For every "one that doth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to "the light, lest his deeds should be reproved*." The light of the Gospel is too prying and inquisitive for such an one. It reveals certain things which he could wish to conceal from all the world, and if possible from himself. Nor is this all; it not only reveals, but it reproves them. It strikes him with an evidence he cannot bear; an evidence not only of its own truth, but of his unworthy conduct. The Gospel does indeed offend him; but it is not his understanding, it is his conscience, that is shocked; he could easily credit what it requires him to believe; but he cannot, or rather he will not, practice what it commands him to do.

It is plain that such a man cannot possibly admit a Revelation that condemns him; and it is *as* plain that the man of virtue cannot spurn the hand that is graciously stretched out to reward him. If he is a *truly* virtuous man, that is, one who sincerely labors to know his duty, and sincerely intends to perform it, he cannot but wish for more light to guide him in the investigation, more assistance to support him in the discharge of it, more happiness to crown his perseverance in it, than bare reason alone can afford him. This is what all the best and wisest Heathens most ardently desired, what nature has been continually looking out for with the utmost earnestness of expectation. When with a mind thus disposed he sits down to examine the Gospel, suggest to me the least shadow of a reason why he should reject it. He finds in it a religion, pure, holy, and benevolent, as the God that gave it. He finds not only its moral precepts, but even its sublimest mysteries, calculated to promote internal sanctity, vital piety, unbounded philanthropy. He finds it throughout so great and noble, so congenial to the finest feelings, and most generous sentiments of his soul; that he cannot but *wish* it may be true; and never yet, I believe, did any good man wish it to be true, but he actually found

* John iii. 20.

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it so. He sees in it every expectation of nature answered, every infirmity supported, every want supplied, every terror dissipated, every hope confirmed; nay, he sees that God has done exceeding abundantly above all that he could either ask or think; that he has given him (what reason could hardly have the idea of) *eternal happiness in a life to come*. Will this man "love darkness rather than that light?" Will he choose to pursue virtue, with much pains, little success, and no other *wages* than *death*; or to be led to her through a safe and easy path by an infallible guide, who does not desire him to "serve God for nought?"

Let me not however be understood to assert, or to represent the text as asserting, that *all* unbelievers are without exception absolutely wicked men. There are some, no doubt, who lead, what is called, good moral lives. Yet, if you examine even these very strictly, you will, I believe, seldom find that their virtue is so pure, so uniform, so extensive, so complete in all the several branches of duty, as that of a truly devout Christian. And it should be observed also, that men may reject the Gospel, not only because they are dissolute in their conduct, but for various other reasons: because, perhaps, they are too busy, or too idle, to examine carefully into the truth: because like Gallio, "they care for none of these things," and like him "drive them away" with contempt "from the judg-"ment-seat*" of their own mind; because they give themselves up to a warm lively imagination; and are impatient to show that they have more depth of thought, more freedom of spirit, and elevation of mind, than the rest of the world; because, in fine, they are ambitious to figure at the head of a sect, to enjoy the delightful triumph of beating down long-established opinions, and erecting upon their ruins a little favorite system of their own. Now all these causes of infidelity, though less culpable than downdright profligacy, are yet evidently great faults, and indicate more or less a depraved turn of mind; and from immoralities of

* Acts xviii. 16.

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this kind at least scarce any sceptics are entirely free. Or, admit that some are; yet these instances are confessedly very rare; and a prudent man would no more chuse to embark his morality on so precarious a bottom, than he would venture to walk in the dark amidst rocks and precipices, because some perhaps have done it without receiving any harm. In general, therefore, the ground of unbelief laid down by our Saviour in the text is undoubtedly a true one; and if a man shuns the light, it is an almost certain sign that his deeds are, in some sense or other, in a greater or a lesser degree, evil, and consequently his condemnation just.

Yet how can this be? you will perhaps say. Can God punish his creatures for walking by that light which he himself has set up in their own minds, *though* he has at the same time perhaps revealed a fuller light from Heaven*? Most certainly he can; for the very same reason that a prince might punish his subjects for acting by the law of nature, instead of governing themselves by the civil laws of the land. It is not a matter of indifference, whether you embrace Christianity or not. Though reason could answer all the purposes of Revelation (which is far, very far from being the case) yet you are not at liberty to make it your sole guide if there be such a thing as a true Revelation. We are the subjects of the Almighty: and whether we will acknowledge it or not, we live, and cannot *but* live, under his government. His will is the law of his kingdom. If he has made no express declaration of his will, we must collect it as well as we can from what we know of his nature, and our own. But if he *has* expressly declared his will, *that* is the law we are to be governed by. We may indeed refuse to be governed by it; but it is at our peril if we do; for if it proves to be a *true* declaration of his will, to reject it is *rebellion*.

But to rejet or receive it, you may alledge, is not a thing in your own power. Belief depends not on your

* De quoi puis-je etre coupable en servant Dieu selon les Lumieres qu'il donne a mon esprit, & selon les sentimens qu'il inspire a mon Ceur? *Rousseau*, T. 8 *p.* 67.

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will, but your understanding. And will the righteous Judge of the earth condemn you for want of understanding* ? No; but he may and will condemn you for the *wrong conduct* of your understanding. It is not indeed in your power to believe whatever you please, whether credible or incredible; but it *is* in your power to consider thoroughly, whether a supposed incredibility be real or only apparent. It *is* in your power to bestow a greater or less degree of attention on the evidence before you. It *is* in your power to examine it with an earnest desire to find out the truth, and a firm resolution to embrace it wherever you do find it; or, on the contrary, to bring with you a heart full of incorrigible depravity, or invincible prepossessions. Have you then truly and honestly done every thing that is confessedly in your power, towards forming a right judgment of Revelation ? Have you ever laid before yourself in one view the whole collective evidence of Christianity; the consistence, harmony, and connection of all its various parts; the long chain of prophecies undeniably completed in it; the astonishing and well attested miracles that attended it; the perfect sanctity of its author; the purity of its precepts; the sublimity of its doctrines; the amazing rapidity of its progress; the illustrious company of confessors, saints, and martyrs, who died to confirm its truth; together with an infinite number of collateral proofs and subordinate circumstances, all concurring to form such a body of evidence, as no other truth in the world can shew; such as must necessarily bear down, by its own weight and magnitude, all trivial objections to particular parts† ? Surely these things are not trifles; surely they at least demand seriousness and attention. Have you then done the Gospel this common piece of justice ? Have you ever sat down to consider it with impartiality and candor; without any favorite vice or early prejudice, without any fondness

* Est on maître de croire, ou de ne pas croire ? Est ce un crime de n'avoir pas su bien argumenter ? *Rousseau, tom. 6. p. 305.*

† See Dr. Paley's View of the Evidences of Christianity, and a short and elegant Summary of them by Dr. Beattie.

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for applause, or novelty, or refinement, to mislead you? Have you examined it with the same care and diligence, that you would examine a title to an estate? Have you enquired for proper books? Have you read the defences of Revelation as well as the attacks upon it? Have you in difficult points applied for the opinion of wise and learned friends; just as you would consult the ablest lawyers when your property was concerned, or the most skilful physicians when your life was at stake? If you can truly say, that you have done all these things; if you have faithfully bestowed on these enquiries, all the leisure and abilities you are master of, and called in every help within your reach, there is little danger of any material doubts remaining upon your mind. But if after all there should, be not afraid; trust in God and be at peace; "if your own heart "condemn you not, then may you have confidence to-"wards God*." You are in the hands of a gracious Master, who will not require more of you than you are able to perform. To the modest, the humble, the diligent, the virtuous enquirer; who labors after conviction, but cannot thoroughly arrive at it; who never attempts or wishes to infuse his scruples into others; who earnestly strives, who fervently prays for more light and strength; crying out with all the passionate sincerity of an honest heart, "Lord, I believe, help "thou mine unbelief†;" to him every equitable allowance will undoubtedly be made, every instance of compassionate tenderness be shown. "For like as a "father pitieth his own children, even so is the Lord "merciful to them that fear him‡." But to them who neither *fear* nor *regard* him: to the bold unbelieving libertine, who is against the Gospel, because the Gospel is against him; to the man of pride and paradox, who burns to distinguish himself from the vulgar by the novelty of his opinions, and would disdain to follow the common herd of mankind, even though he knew they were leading him to Heaven; to the subtle minute philosopher, who refines away every dictate of common

* 1 John iii. 21. † Mark ix. 24. ‡ Ps. ciii. 13.

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sense, and is lost in the dark profound of his own wretched sophistry; to the buffoon, who laughs and takes pains to make all the world laugh at every thing serious and sacred; to the indolent, negligent, superficial free-thinker, who reads a little, takes for granted a great deal, and understands nothing thoroughly; to the man of pleasure and amusement, who treats all these things with a giddy, wanton, contemptuous levity; and thinks that the whole fabric of Revelation may be overturned, by a silly cavil or a profane jest, thrown out in the gay moments of convivial mirth; to these I say, and all like these, the Almighty will one day most assuredly show, that his gracious offers of salvation are not to be despised, and trampled upon, and ridiculed with impunity.

Consider then, you, who reject the Gospel (if any such be here) consider, I intreat you, *on what grounds* you reject it; and think a little seriously on these things once more in your lives, before you resolve never to think again. Look well into your own hearts and see whether you are *really*, what perhaps you profess to be, unbelievers on conviction, or whether you have taken up your infidelity, as some do their faith, upon trust. It becomes not *us* to judge you uncharitably; but indeed it becomes *you* to examine yourselves very strictly. You may easily deceive the world; you may, if you please, deceive yourselves; but God you cannot deceive. He, to whom all hearts are open as the day, he knows whether you are conscientious and honest doubters, or careless, prejudiced, profane despisers of his word. "It is a small thing for you "to be judged of man's judgment; he that judgeth "you is the Lord*;" and by the unerring rules of his justice you must finally stand or fall. Think then whether you can face that justice without dismay; whether you can boldly plead before the tribunal of Christ the sincerity of your unbelief as a bar to your condemnation. That plea may possibly in *some* cases be a good one. God grant it may in yours! But remember this one thing; that you stake your own souls upon the truth of it.

* 1 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

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SERMON III.

JAMES i. 13.

Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.

NOTWITHSTANDING this general prohibition, there is one sense in which it is very allowable to say (for the sacred writers themselves have said it) that men *are* sometimes tempted of God. And that is when by *tempting* any one is meant only *trying* him, putting his sincerity, his obedience, his faith, or any of his other virtues to the test. In this sense God *tempted* Abraham, when he commanded him to offer up his son*. In this sense he may be said to have tempted the Israelites in the wilderness, on purpose (as Moses expressly tells us) to *prove* them; "to know "what was in their hearts, whether they would keep "his commandments or no†." And in the same manner he every day suffers good men to fall into what is very properly called *trying* circumstances, for the exercise and improvement of their virtue. To tempt men in this way, is evidently no impeachment, either of God's holiness, mercy, or justice. For he does it with the best and most gracious intentions, in order to call out into action the latent great qualities of an honest and a good heart, to hold them up to the observation and applause of mankind, and to reward them in proportion

* Gen. xxii. 1. † Deut. viii. 2.

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to the severity with which he tried them. At *such* temptations we ought to be so far from repining, that, as St. James very rightly advises, we should "count "it all joy when we fall into them*," should look upon them as excellent opportunities kindly thrown into our hands by Heaven itself, of demonstrating our affection, our fidelity, our allegiance to the great Sovereign of the universe.

It is not therefore in this sense, though a very scriptural one, that the text is to be understood, but in that more plain and obvious meaning, which is now almost universally affixed to the word *temptation*. We are forbid to say that God tempts us, as wicked men do, to commit sin; with a desire to draw us into it, and with such powerful solicitations as it is impossible to resist. This is an assertion so daring and profane, that one would think the authority of an apostle was not wanting to warn men against it. Yet from the expression he makes use of, "Let no man say," it should seem, as if some men, in those times of distress and persecution, *had* said it. And even in our own times, though few, if any, are hardy enough to say it in express terms, yet indirectly, and by necessary implication, it is said and insisted upon with vehemence almost every day. For do we not every day hear men pleading *constitution* in excuse for their wickedness, and throwing all the blame of their vices on the strength of passion, or the violence of temptation? And what is this but to say, in other words, that they are *tempted of God?* What is it but to say, that he who is the author of their constitution has given them appetites which they are not able to govern, and placed them in the midst of temptations which it is impossible to resist or escape? That the powers with which he has furnished them are not equal to the duties he requires, and that therefore he alone is answerable for the crimes into which they fall?

It should be charitably presumed, that out of the great numbers who openly avow this plea of constitu-

* James i. 2.

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tion, and the still greater numbers who secretly adopt and act upon it, there are but few, in proportion, who see the flagrant impiety of it; who are sensible that they say in effect, what the apostle tells us no man ought to say, that they are tempted of God. But whether they perceive this consequence, or whether they perceive it not, it is highly requisite to show the falsehood of a notion, which strikes at the very root of all morality and religion, and is the favorite argument in the mouth of every libertine who thinks it worth while to reason at all upon the subject.

It must be confessed, indeed, that this life is (what it would be strange if a state of probation was not) a very painful, and almost constant struggle between appetite and duty. But it will be found, I trust upon a fair enquiry, that we are not so unequal to the conflict as some men would willingly persuade us to believe. They have themselves been vanquished, and would have it thought impossible to conquer. They would have us judge of the difficulty of the enterprize from the weak efforts they made to surmount it, and wilfully magnify the force of the enemy, in order to extenuate the guilt and the disgrace of their defeat.

I mean not here to say, that this conquest is to be obtained always by mere human strength alone. This were to betray the very cause of Christianity for the sake of defending one of its duties. Mere human strength alone can, indeed, on some occasions, when properly exerted, do great things; much greater than most men are willing to imagine. This is evident from those well-known instances of heroic virtue in the heathen world, delivered down to us in history, which incontestibly prove, that the native dignity of virtue, and the simple efforts of unenlightened and unassisted reason, are *sometimes* able to stand the shock of temptation, in the most delicate and trying circumstances. But these instances are very rare; to be found only among some few men of elevated souls and improved understandings; and are never mentioned but as the moral prodigies and wonders of antiquity.

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Had man been able of himself "to overcome the "world, and to work out his own salvation," there had been no need of any new religion; God's grace had been superfluous, and Christ had died in vain. But the gross depravity of mankind, before the publication of the Gospel, too plainly showed the weakness of human nature, when left to itself, and evinced the absolute necessity of some extraordinary support. To give us this support, and to guide our steps aright amidst the snares and dangers that every where surround us, our Redeemer came from heaven; and it is the peculiar glory and privilege of Christianity, that it is the only religion which ever did or could propose sufficient motives, and afford sufficient helps, to fortify its disciples against the allurements of sin, and to keep them unspotted from the world.

With the Deist, then, or the Atheist, with him that professes only natural religion, or him that professes none at all, we pretend not to contest the point; we readily allow temptation to be, *on their principles*, sometimes irresistible, and must leave them to the hard dominion of unbridled passions, and the tumults of a distempered soul.

But to him who believes that there *is* a God, and that he is possessed of all those attributes, which both reason and Revelation ascribe to him, there cannot be the least shadow of a doubt in this point, if he does not suffer his passions to throw a cloud over his understanding. For, can he seriously believe that a God of infinite wisdom has given us a rule for the direction of our lives, and yet rendered it in many cases absolutely impossible for us to conform to that rule? Can he persuade himself that a God of infinite mercy and goodness, though he *knows* the strength of his creatures, yet exacts what is beyond it, and, with all the cruelty of an Egyptian task-master, demands virtue, without having given us the capacity of *being* virtuous? Can he suppose that a Being of infinite justice, first compels us to sin, by the strength of our appetites, and then punishes the wretched sinner; that he is at once the au-

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thor and avenger of iniquity? Can he imagine, that he who is holiness itself, who, as the text expresses it, *cannot be tempted of evil*, who is of purer eyes than even to behold it without indignation, is yet capable of tempting others to what he himself forbids and abhors? Can he, in fine, bring himself to think, that the precepts, the exhortations, the promises, the threatenings of the Gospel, are all a mockery and insult upon us, setting before us life and death, good and evil, and applying to us as free agents and accountable beings, when at the same time constitution or temptation takes from us all liberty of will, and necessarily determines us to a course of vice? This were to convert the gracious Father of mankind into a frantic and capricious tyrant over his wretched creatures, to strip him of his best perfections, to make vain the noblest faculties of man, and overturn the whole fabric of natural as well as revealed religion; which is surely purchasing a little self-defence at much too high a price, and doubling instead of extenuating our guilt.

Had God made no express declarations on this point, what has been already said would be abundantly sufficient to decide it. But he who well knew how apt men are to deceive themselves in enquiries of this nature, and how little sometimes the most conclusive arguments avail against the clamors of appetite, and the attractions of pleasure, did not leave so important a truth to be collected from reason only, nor trusted the strength of our understandings, and the honesty of our hearts, in a case where they are both so liable to be misled. If any thing is clearly and expressly revealed to us in Scripture, it is this; that we want not the *means* of subduing temptation, if we will but make use of them; that "our faith will enable us to over-"come the world; that if we resist the devil he will "flee from us, that therefore, whenever we fall, it is "entirely our own fault, our own infirmity; and that "every man is then only tempted, when he is drawn "away of his own lusts and enticed*;" of his *own*

* 1 John v. 4. James iv. 7. Ib. i. 14.

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lusts, properly so called; not those passions and appetites which God gave him, but those unreasonable cravings which he has himself created by habitual indulgence and unnatural provocations. Nay, in order to quiet all our fears, and to give us the fullest satisfaction on this head, we are assured, that God will, by his Holy Spirit, "help our infirmities, and strengthen us "with might in the inner man; that he knoweth how "to deliver the godly out of temptation; and if we "ourselves cannot *find* a way to escape, he will *make* "us one, and will not suffer us to be tempted (unless "we are *determined* to be so) above what we are able "to bear*."

After such strong assurances as these, by which God Almighty stands as it were *engaged* to befriend us, one would not think it possible for the wit of man to call in question so plain a truth, as that of our ability, with the divine assistance, to correct constitution and resist temptation. And indeed men are very ready to acknowledge it in every case but their own; a plain proof that the reason why they do not acknowledge it in their own case too, is not because they want evidence, but because they want honesty. Every one thinks that his own darling passion is that only insuperable one which was destined to reign over the heart of man, and readily gives up all the rest. Believe what every man says of himself, and there is not a temptation but is invincible; believe what he says of his neighbors, and there is none but may be easily subdued. Nay, even in the very same species and degree of wickedness, we have different measures of judging of ourselves and other men. If our brother be overtaken in a fault, we condemn him without hesitation and without mercy, though he has perhaps all the infirmity of human nature to plead in his behalf. And yet we can calmly acquit ourselves, when guilty of the very same crimes, by a thousand pretended alleviations. We form distinctions in our own favor which have no foundation in nature, we find out particularities in our

* Rom. viii. 26. Eph. iii. 16. 2 Pet. ii. 9. 1 Cor. x. 13.

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situation which escape every eye but our own. Almost every man, in spite of reason and experience, will flatter himself, that there is some circumstance or other peculiar to his own case, which, as it distinguishes him from the common lot, exempts him also from the common guilt of other men. His passions are stronger, his governing powers are weaker, or the temptation that assails him more violent than human nature ever before experienced. Another man, perhaps, might have come off victorious in the conflict, but as for himself, he is so unhappily framed, or so unluckily circumstanced, that he finds it in vain to resist; he finds it impossible to oppose a conspiracy, which seems formed against his virtue by every thing around him.

Nothing is more fatal, and at the same time nothing more common, than this piece of self-delusion. It is for this reason that, when St. Paul is endeavoring to strengthen the Corinthians against the trials they were exposed to, he sets out with assuring them, "that no "temptation had taken them but such as *was common* "*to man*," as well knowing, that till he had convinced them of this all other arguments would be ineffectual. To men possessed with this opinion of uncommon difficulties in their situation, it is in vain to alledge the examples of those, who have successfully struggled against the pleasures or persecutions of the world, and fought the good fight with glory. The answer is always at hand: They were not tempted as we were, or they would have fallen as we did. ONE, however, we are sure there was, who was in all things "tempted like as "we are, sin only excepted," and who was for this very reason tempted, that his disciples and soldiers might not despair of conquering an adversary, whom they had seen the captain of their salvation subdue before them.

It is therefore of the utmost importance to us, not to impose upon ourselves by false suppositions of some uncommon degree of violence in the temptations that befall us, or the appetites that are given to us. There

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are probably thousands of our fellow creatures, who are in as trying a situation as ourselves; thousands at least who think themselves so; and have therefore full as good a claim to the plea of peculiarity as we have: that is, in fact, no claim at all: for what is common to so many, can be peculiar to none. Among so great a number in similar circumstances, some, it is certain, *do* resist the solicitations that assail them; and if we are not equally successful, it is only because we are not equally vigilant and active. Sacred history (to say nothing of profane) will furnish us with numberless examples of the most invincible integrity, temperance, and fortitude, under the severest trials, under every possible disadvantage, both of nature and situation, that can be imagined. What, therefore, has been done once, may be done again. Human nature is nearly the same in all ages. Our passions are not stronger than those of our forefathers; our difficulties in some respects much less; our natural strength and supernatural assistance to the full as great; and if therefore we do not struggle against the world as effectually as they did, we are left without excuse.

But if, at last, men will be convinced by no experience but their own, to their own we must refer them; and if they will neither believe the testimony of man, nor the promises of God, they will at least believe themselves, and give credit to the report of their own hearts. And in fact may we not appeal to every man's own breast, whether he has not actually, on certain occasions, resisted those solicitations, which he declares are not to be resisted; whether he cannot recollect a time when a regard to reputation, to interest, to decency, to propriety, or some other casual consideration, has repressed the violence of his predominant passion, when most urgent and impetuous? The common occurrences of life make this absolutely necessary; and every one that is not lost to all sense of honor and shame, and all regard to external appearances, must confess it to have been frequently the case with himself. How often, for instance, does the presence of

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some respectable person restrain even the most irritable man alive from a sudden burst of passion, which at another time, and under the same temptation to indulge, he would have declared it was impossible to control? It is notorious that men *can* mortify their strongest passions when they please, and that they do every day forego the most exquisite gratifications, from what they call *prudential motives*. There are not more importunate appetites in man, than those of hunger and thirst, and yet, what is more common than, for the sake of life and health, to do the utmost violence to both? Nay, even when the natural rage of thirst is still further exasperated by the burnings of a fever, yet if such abstinence be deemed necessary, we can and do deny these most earnest cravings of appetite, and in this and many other instances undergo far greater torment for the sake of preserving a life we *must* part with at last, than is almost ever necessary for securing the possession of life eternal.

What our own experience teaches us, our own consciences confirm to us, which, by instantly smiting us for every wicked action, however strongly we were prompted to it by nature or solicited by temptation, loudly intimate to us that it was in our power to have done otherwise; for what is naturally impossible, can never be imputable, either here or hereafter. The truth is, these specious pretences of ungovernable passions and invincible temptations cannot stand the test even at the partial tribunal of our own hearts; and how then shall they appear before that most awful and impartial one, THE JUDGMENT-SEAT OF GOD?

Let us not, then, any longer delude ourselves, and affront our Maker, by throwing all the blame of our misconduct on the strength of temptation or the frailty of our nature. It is enough that we have acted wickedly, let us not go on moreover, "to charge God "foolishly." Let us rather, with the royal psalmist, "confess our wickedness, and be sorry for our sins." A casual lapse, or a distressful surprise, God may and will, no doubt, upon our sincere repentance, forgive;

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but a cool deliberate defence of our impiety, is an insult upon Heaven, which can hope for no mercy. To accuse our constitution, is to accuse the author of that constitution; to say we are by any means compelled to sin, is in fact to say, "we are tempted of God;" an assertion not only repugnant to the plainest declarations of Scripture, but to the plainest dictates of common sense. It is not God that tempts, but man that *will* be tempted. It is not by God's appointment, but by man's own negligence and supineness, that temptation becomes too strong for his virtue. The growth of the passions is gradual, and may be seasonably checked; the approach of temptation is visible, and may be easily guarded against. But, instead of that, we generally invite the danger, and court our own ruin; we foster up some favorite appetite by constant indulgence, and then mistaking, wilfully mistaking, this monstrous production of habit for the genuine child of nature, very disingenuously complain of our passions and constitutions. We see the enemy of our salvation approaching at a distance, and, instead of preparing to make a vigorous resistance, or (what is generally the safest way) a timely retreat, we either sit still in stupid indolence and suffer ourselves to be subdued, or we run to meet the destroyer with open arms, and make haste to be undone.

That some men are by nature more prone to vice than others, and that there is a difference in the original frame and temperament of our minds, as there certainly is in that of our bodies, is not perhaps to be absolutely denied; but it must at the same time be allowed, that a bad constitution of mind, as well as of body, may, by proper care and attention, be greatly if not wholly amended. And, as it sometimes happens that they who have the weakest and most distempered frames, by means of an exact temperance and an unshaken perseverance in rule and method, outlive those of a robuster make and more luxuriant health; so there are abundant instances, where men of the most depraved turn of mind, by keeping a steady guard up-

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on their weak parts, and gradually but continually correcting their defects "going on from strength to "strength," and from one degree of perfection to another, have at length arrived at a higher pitch of virtue than those for whom nature had done much more, and who would therefore do but little for themselves. It is said of the great Athenian philosopher, that he was by nature the very reverse of all those virtues which afterwards shone so conspicuous in his conduct; that he was born one of the worst, and lived and died one of the best of men. This at least is certain, that, whatever may be the corruption of our nature, whatever the power of pain to stagger our virtue, or of pleasure to seduce it, it is impossible we can be so formed, or so situated by a just and good God, as to be under an absolute necessity of transgressing those laws which he has laid down for the regulation of our conduct. We may rest assured that he will give us powers, either natural or supernatural, to balance our defects. In the common trials of our virtue, the common efforts of human nature, and the common influences of the Holy Spirit, will be able to support us: "if any "temptation take us, *more* than is common to man," God will send us, provided we desire, and endeavor to deserve it, more than common assistance; for his strength is made perfect in our weakness, and we may in this sense, most truly say with the apostle, "that "when we are weak then in reality are we strong*."

We are not, however, to conclude from hence, that God will deliver us out of temptation without any trouble on our part. As without *him* we can do nothing, so neither will he do any thing without *us*. His grace is not intended to supersede, but to co-operate with, our own most earnest endeavors; and the most effectual method of securing to ourselves the divine assistance, is to make a speedy and vigorous use of all those means with which we are furnished, for working out our salvation. What these means are, and how we may apply them to the best advantage, will be considered in a separate discourse.

* 2 Cor. xii. 10.

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SERMON IV.

JAMES i. 13.

Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.

IN the preceding discourse I attempted to show, that to throw all the blame of our vices on the infirmity of our natural constitution, is in fact to say that we are "tempted of God;" that this indirect accusation of our Maker is as groundless as it is impious; that the notion of ungovernable passions and irresistible temptations, contradicts our clearest apprehensions of the Divine nature and perfections, the most express declarations of Scripture, the testimony of past ages, and even our own daily experience. And, although this might be deemed sufficient for the conviction of any reasonable man, yet, in a point of such great importance, I shall readily be excused for pursuing the same subject a little further, and for going on to show, not only that temptations *may* be subdued, but *how* they may be subdued; what those means are, in short, which reason and religion have put into our hands, for combatting these enemies of our salvation; for it must at last be owned, that the most effectual way of proving any end to be attainable, is to point out the path that leads to it.

I. The first step, then, towards resisting temptations, is to regulate our notions; and before we can hope to

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act virtuously, we must learn to think justly. The surprising influence which worldly allurements have over our minds, is in a great measure owing to the high opinion we entertain of the pleasures or advantages they set before us. That restless power of the mind, THE IMAGINATION, which is "only evil continually*," is for ever leading us beyond the bounds of truth; and, by raising up before us certain visionary scenes of happiness, so excites our expectations and inflames our desires, that we wait with impatience for an opportunity of gratifying them, and are very easily induced to pursue, and to seize with eagerness, what we have been accustomed to contemplate with so much pleasure.

We must therefore keep a steady eye on this licentious wanderer, and never suffer it to fix our attention so long on improper objects, as to delude us into a false opinion of their excellence, and an insatiable desire to attain them, as indispensibly necessary to our happiness.

Had the wretched Ahab, when he was struck with the beauty and the convenience of Naboth's vineyard, called in a little timely reflexion, and a little common sense to his aid; had he for one moment represented to himself the folly of supposing that the acquisition of a few acres of land could add any thing to the real comfort of a man who was already in possession of a kingdom, and of every enjoyment that regal power could command, he might, in this instance at least, have escaped that heavy load of guilt and misery which he and the vile partner of his throne and of his crimes, brought down upon their own heads. But the proximity of this vineyard to his own house had, among other circumstances, captivated his fancy; and instead, of resisting the first impression, and bringing his silly passion to the bar of reason, he indulged and cherished it till he began to think it absolutely impossible for him to live without that favorite spot, which he wanted, it seems for a *garden of herbs*†. Unable to accomplish this important purpose, "he laid him down on his bed and

* Gen. vi. 5. † 1 Kings xxi. 2.

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"turned away his face, and would eat no bread*." This heavy affliction, however was soon removed. His wife gave him, as she had promised, the vineyard, which she purchased by a murder, and he went down with joy to take possession of it. But his joy, as is commonly the case with such triumphant sinners, was of very short duration. He was met on the very spot with that severe rebuke, to which his own conscience must have given irresistible force. "Hast thou killed, "and also taken possession? Thus saith the Lord, in "the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, "shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine†."

Let this memorable example teach us, as well it may, not to allow our imaginations to overbear our judgments; not to give more importance to the objects of our wishes than their real intrinsic worth deserves; not to persuade ourselves, in short, as we are but too apt to do, that the whole happiness of our lives depends on the possession of the merest trifles. To secure ourselves against this fatal error, let us learn to look on things in that true unerring light in which the Gospel of Christ holds them out to us; and in estimating the value of earthly enjoyments, let us be careful to consider, not merely the present pleasure or profit attending them, but every diminishing or debasing circumstance which naturally belongs to them; the shortness of their duration, the pains it generally costs us to obtain them, the substantial happiness of which they frequently deprive us; and the shame, ignominy, remorse, and misery, which almost constantly succeed to the indulgence of every guilty passion. If all these appendages are not taken into the account, we shall make but a very unfair and imperfect estimate; and if they are, there will be no danger of our setting too high a value upon worldly gratifications.

It is for this reason, that when St. Paul is arming his Christian soldier for this very combat against sinful propensities and allurements, the first direction he gives him, is, *to have his loins girt about with truth*‡;

* 1 Kings xxi. 4. † Ib. ver. 19. ‡ Ephes. vi. 14.

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that is, to prepare himself for the conflict by strengthening and confirming his mind with true Gospel notions of the world and its enjoyments. This he will always find to be one of the strongest barriers against the inroads of vice, one of the most effectual means to confine his passions within their due bounds, and to restrain him from those immoral principles and irregular practices, which are the most certain consequences of wrong opinions.

II. When our notions are thus regulated, our desires will of course be much abated; for they are generally proportioned to the supposed value of the desired object. But in order more effectually to break and subdue them, we must inure them to an early obedience, and a patient submission to restraint. The man of the world affirms that temptations are irresistible; and so indeed *he* may sometimes find them; but it is only because they meet with inflamed appetites, and desires made untractable by habitual indulgence. Let the same solicitations assault a man with the same natural inclinations, but humbled and chastised by an early discipline; and these formidable assailants shall become weak and impotent things; and we shall plainly see the difference between one who seeks all occasions to excite and exasperate his passions, and one who takes every opportunity to check and to control them. It is indeed our misfortune, that, for the first part of our lives, we are almost entirely under the dominion of our natural appetites and desires; which have therefore the advantage of making the earliest impressions upon the mind, and gaining an ascendency over us before the light of reason, or the more glorious light of Revelation, breaks in upon the soul. And it is never to be enough lamented, that they who have the first care of our persons, and who ought to train up the soul to habits of self-government, by seasonable denials and well-judged severities; that these I say, through ignorance, inattention, or ill-timed tenderness, too often betray that most important trust. By indulging every froward wish, every wayward humor of the infant mind,

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they frequently sow deep in our hearts the seeds of vice; and cherish, instead of checking, those turbulent desires, which, first trying their strength in trifling, and therefore disregarded instances, afterwards break out into the most mischievous excesses, to the disturbance of our own happiness and the peace of mankind. It will therefore require some assiduity and address to correct this unhappy defect of our constitution, and the still more unhappy consequences of our education. We must watch the first motions, and suppress the first risings of our irregular desires. We must, from the moment that reason takes the reins into her hands, assert her natural sovereignty over the soul, and, by a timely and vigorous display of her power, strike a terror into her seditious subjects, and awe them at once into submission. We must be daily confirming her superiority, by exerting it on all occasions, and making use even of the slightest advantages over the passions. For every victory of reason over appetite, however inconsiderable in itself, yet by animating the one, and dispiriting the other, adds new strength to the mind; and insensibly habituates it to resist the strongest solicitations that can assail our virtue.

It is with this view, and this only, that the Gospel of Christ so warmly and so wisely recommends to us, the much neglected duties of *voluntary mortification and self-denial.* Christianity is of too tender and compassionate a turn, to delight in the misery of its disciples, or to take an ill-natured pleasure in thwarting our inclinations, and counteracting our nature. It never enjoins a hardship merely to see how well we can bear it, but in order to prepare us for some greater trial which we must necessarily undergo. Our blessed Lord well knew what was in man, and what kind of management was the properest for him. He knew, that if we never denied our passions before it was absolutely necessary, they would not be denied when it was so; and that, unless we strengthened the governing powers of the soul, by frequently exercising their authority in lesser matters, they would not be

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able to maintain it in the weightier matters of the law.

When therefore we are commanded in Scripture, "to deny ourselves; to take up our cross and follow "Christ; to mortify our members which are on the "earth; to beware of conforming to the world; to "pluck out a right eye or cut off a right hand that "offends us,*" these expressions do by no means imply what some have chosen to infer from them; that we are to renounce the world, and all its pleasures, employments, connexions, and concerns; to bury ourselves in cloisters or deserts; to forego every thing that is cheerful or agreeable to our nature, and consume our whole life in solitude, abstinence, devotion, and unremitting austerity. This is an idea of our religion which nothing but the strangest misconception of it by its friends, or the grossest misrepresentation of it by its enemies, could possibly have suggested. According to the fairest and most established rules of interpretation, when applied to the strong figurative language of the Orientals, these phrases and many others of the like import in the sacred writings, mean nothing more than (what every wise moralist must approve, and every man of experience must know to be absolutely necessary to the preservation of our virtue in the midst of a corrupt world) a constant habit of vigilance, circumspection, and self-government; a cautious and jealous attention to the movements of our minds and the progress of our passions; a discreet and sober, not a criminal and unbounded conformity to the world; a renunciation of *ourselves*, that is, of all *selfish and sordid views* that interfere with the conscientious discharge of every religious obligation; a strict abstinence from all irregular and immoral gratifications, without either declining any of the duties, or sullenly withdrawing from the harmless enjoyments, conveniences, and comforts of social life. It is true, in short, that an exact, or, if you please, rigorous discipline, is required of every man,

* Luke ix. 23. Col. iii. 5. Rom. xii. 2. Matt. v. 29, 30.

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who enlists under the banners of the cross. "He "must endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus "Christ*." And although this has been made a frequent topic of ridicule or of complaint among those who call themselves philosophers, and has been represented as a grievous burthen too heavy for human nature to support; yet this *moral discipline* of the soul is grounded on the same reasons, and justifiable on the same principles, as that strict *military discipline*, to which it is frequently compared in Scripture; and which every wise commander finds it necessary to exact and to maintain among his soldiers. It may appear to them sometimes harsh and severe, but it leads to order, ease, security and victory. The case is the same in our Christian warfare. Every restraint which the Gospel imposes on us tends ultimately to make our "yoke easy and our burden light," and its very cruelties if we may call them so, are in fact tender mercies. We must therefore submit with patience to the sacrifices it demands from us, and we shall be amply repaid for the transient uneasiness which at first perhaps they may give us. We must, in compliance with its injunctions, not only abstain from those lusts which "openly war against the soul†," but, like them who strive for the mastery in the combat or the race, must be "temperate in all things‡;" must train up ourselves for the good fight of faith by frequent preparatory exercises, must, "keep the body under, and bring it into "subjection¶" by timely precautions, and judicious restraints, that, when temptation calls upon us for the trial of our virtue, our desires may be found patient of control, and able to support a disappointment.

III. There are two extremes to be equally avoided in our moral conduct, because, though opposite to each other, they may prove equally fatal to our virtue; a too high opinion of our adversary's strength, or a too great confidence in our own. If once we are persuaded that all resistance is vain, we shall never call forth the strength that God has put into our hands,

* 2 Tim. ii. 3. † 1 Pet. ii. 11. ‡ 1 Cor. ix. 25. ¶ Ib. ix. 27.

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but tamely give ourselves up on the first appearance of danger; or if, on the contrary, we flatter ourselves that *no* resistance is necessary, "a sudden destruction" shall come upon us unawares, and we shall fall into what may be properly called "our own mischief." To steer then discreetly between these two opposite points, is what demands our utmost care and attention. We must, on the one hand, possess ourselves with a proper sense of our own natural resources, a firm trust in God's supernatural assistance, and a thorough conviction that our endeavors, if honestly and earnestly exerted, "shall not be in vain in the Lord;" and on the other, from a due consciousness of our own weakness and corruption, neglect no precaution in our power, nor wantonly or heedlessly expose ourselves to unnecessary danger. This indeed is the more common error of the two, and therefore to be the more carefully guarded against. Men are much more apt to have too high, than too low, an opinion of their own fortitude, and so fall through want, rather than excess, of caution. It will, therefore, generally be the safest way to distrust our own courage and resolution, and to avoid rather than to provoke temptation; for we may often save ourselves by a timely retreat, when we should have made but a weak and inglorious defence.

It is indeed always our own fault if ever we find ourselves beset with solicitations, which prove too strong for our virtue. We may generally recollect a time, when, if we had but exerted the least resolution, they must have vanished before us. But we indolently give way to one wrong compliance after another, which we might easily have resisted at first; and then, when it is too late to exert the strength which our Maker has given us, we boldly reproach him with having given us none at all. There is, in short, a point at which we have it in our power to stop; but if, through a fatal negligence, or a false security, we let that opportunity slip; if we suffer ourselves to be drawn a little further, and still a little further on, whatever snares we may afterwards be entangled in, we can have no reason to

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complain of being surprised by stratagem, or overcome by superior force.

IV. But in order to guard against temptation still more effectually, take unto you, my burthen, the SHIELD OF FAITH*; for this, as St. John assures you; "is the victory that overcometh the world, even our "faith†." And the apostle might well promise these great things of faith, since it is this which supplies us with one of the principal things we want, a counterpoise to the pleasures and the interests of this life. For by faith is here meant a firm, a rational, and a vital belief of the being of God, of the religion taught by Christ, and the truth of his promises and his threatenings as declared in the Gospel; a persuasion that God *is*, and that he is through his blessed Son, "a rewarder of all those that diligently seek him‡." It is this persuasion, and this only, which in certain circumstances can preserve our integrity and our innocence unshaken. When this world, as it sometimes happens, spreads before us on a sudden its most powerful allurements and advantages, and every thing conspires to make them operate with their full force upon the heart; what is there that can destroy the influence of such dangerous attractions, and rescue us from present ruin? Can honor, can interest, can reputation, or those most watchful natural guardians of our virtue, pride and shame? These, alas, whatever they may do in some trifling instances, are found to be weak and slender ties, "as flax burnt with fire¶," when opposed to the violence of some passions, and the shock of some temptations. It is here then faith steps in to our relief, and interposes, between us and danger, that HEAVENLY SHIELD which is proof against all assailants, or, to use the more forcible and expressive language of Scripture, "wherewith we shall be "able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked "one**." Of this every sincere believer may have, whenever he pleases, experimental conviction. For if he will but frequently and seriously meditate on those

*Eph. vi. 16. †1 John v. 4. ‡Heb. ii. 6. ¶Judges xv. 14. **Eph. vi. 16.

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awful doctrines which the Christian revelation sets before him: that there is a moral governor of the universe, infinite in wisdom, justice, power, and holiness; that in his presence we continually live and act; that his all-seeing eye is constrantly fixed upon us, "is about our "bed, and about our path, and spieth out all our "ways;" that there is not so much as "a word in our "mouth, or a thought in our heart, but he knoweth it "altogether*;" that, when the glory of this world has passed away, there will be a general resurrection to another, a future state of existence, a most solemn day of retribution; that our great Judge will then require a strict account of all our thoughts, words, and actions, and will make it known to the whole world, that, "verily there *is* a reward for the righteous, doubtless "there *is* a God that judgeth the earth†:" if, I say, the sincere Christian will but take care, by frequent meditation and recollection, to impress a deep sense of these momentous truths upon his soul, and render them familiar to his thoughts, he will by degrees so encrease his faith, and so accustom himself to this train of reflections, that the moment temptation assaults him, they will habitually and mechanically recur to his mind; the rewards and punishments of a future world will instantly present themselves to his view; the fear of the Lord will come upon him, and he will say with the patriarch on a like occasion, "how can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God‡?"

V. There is still one thing more remaining, which, though occasionally touched upon before, is of such great importance as to require in this place a distinct consideration, since without it all our other resources will be ineffectual, and that is the assistance of God's Holy Spirit. To our great comfort we are assured, that although the powers of our own weak and corrupt nature may frequently be insufficient to carry us successfully through the difficulties we have to encounter, yet the grace of God will be at all times, and in the greatest exigencies, sufficient for us‖. This divine and

* Psalm cxxxix. 3, 4. † Psalm lviii. 11. ‡ Gen. xxxix. 9. ‖ 2. Cor. xii. 9.

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powerful instrument of our deliverance is, as we are informed, always to be obtained by prayer.

"Our heavenly Father will give his Holy Spirit to "them that ask him. Whatsoever we ask in prayer, "believing, we shall receive*." But then it is not in time of need only we must "seek the Lord;" in the moment of danger we may be reduced to such straits that nothing but a miracle can save us. We must therefore make God our friend long before, and provide against the evil day while it is yet afar off, and all seems peace and security around us. His Holy Spirit is not to be made subservient to a present purpose, to be invoked in our necessity, and slighted in time of safety; he must either abide constantly with us, or for ever remain a stranger to us. It is not an occasional ejaculation, vented by accident or extorted by fear, that will bring him down from heaven; it is only upon repeated solicitations, and a due preparation for his reception, that this divine guest will condescend to take up his abode with us. We are, as the apostle expresses it in his strong manner of speaking, "to pray always with "all prayer and supplication, and watch thereunto with "all perseverance†." And this will not only draw down upon us a plentiful effusion of divine grace, but improve and confirm our own internal strength; will engage our attention, excite our industry, encrease our caution, and even suggest to us every human means of deliverance. For prayer has of itself a natural tendency to obtain its own purposes, and we grow insensibly better whilst we wish to be so.

It is, in short, on our own vigilance, circumspection, and self-discipline, added to our most earnest prayers for the divine assistance, that all our virtue here, and all our happiness hereafter, through the merits of our Redeemer, entirely depend. If a man *will* throw himself in the way of danger, and venture to the very brink of vice; if he *will* suffer his thoughts to wander, or dwell upon improper objects; if he knows his weak parts, and yet leaves them without defence; if he sees

* Luke xi. 13. Matt. xxi 22. † Eph. vi. 18.

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a growing appetite, and instead of checking, seeks every opportunity to feed and to inflame it; if he confines his views to present enjoyments, nor ever spends a thought upon futurity; if, in fine, he lives without God in the world, without any awe of his presence, any trust in his assistance, or any fear of his judgments, he must expect that the slightest temptations will get the better of his virtue, already half subdued.

But if, on the contrary, he sets himself seriously and in earnest to search out and to correct his infirmities; if he flies at the first approach of temptation, and takes alarm at the most distant intimation of danger; if he curbs that busy dangerous power, the imagination; "if he keeps his heart with all diligence*," and guards the issues of life; if, as the apostle advises, he takes unto him THE SHIELD OF FAITH, opposing the joys of heaven to the pleasures of sin, and having less regard to a present gratification than the future recompence of reward; above all, if he never ceases importuning the throne of Grace for the assistance of God's Holy Spirit to purify his soul, invigorate his resolutions, and support him under all the difficulties and discouragements of his Christian warfare; he may depend upon it, that whatever may be his *constitution*, whatever the nature or degree of the temptations he is exposed to, not all the powers of darkness shall be able to prevail against him. Though he may perhaps accidentally fall, yet he shall "never be cast away; for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand†."

* Prov. iv. 23. † Psal. xxxvii. 24.

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SERMON V.

MATTHEW XXV. 46.

And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

THIS is one among numberless other passages in holy writ, in which a future judgment, and an eternal state of existence hereafter, are clearly and positively announced to us; and it is from these declarations of the Gospel, and these only, that we derive the *certain* expectation of immortal life. To pretend, therefore, as some have done, that we had already sufficient notices of this important truth from the light of nature, and that the conviction, produced by these notices, is so complete as to supersede the necessity of any further information, is to give nature a degree of merit to which she is far from having any just pretensions, and to make a very ungrateful return for the invaluable advantages we have received, in this and many other respects, from the Revelation made by Christ. But yet to assert, on the other hand, that natural religion gives us not the smallest ground to hope that we shall survive the grave, and that every argument for it, except those which Scripture supplies, is perfectly vain and nugatory, and unworthy of the least regard, is surely running into another extreme, no less destitute of foundation, and no less hurtful in its consequences than the former.*

* It has been very justly observed, that some writers, by exalting the powers of reason, in matters of religion, too high, have destroyed the *necessity* of Revelation, and others, by degrading them too low, have risqued the *reasonableness* of it. Div. Leg. vol. ii. p. 26.

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The natural and moral evidences of another life after this, though confessedly inferior, very greatly inferior in authority and force, to those of Revelation, yet undoubtedly have their proper weight and use; and to depreciate their just value, and sink them as much as possible in the estimation of mankind, is to do no real service (although there may have been a sincere *intention* of doing it) to the cause of Christianity; which has no need, in this or in any other instance, to rise on the ruins of human reason. On the contrary, it disdains not to receive reason as its friend and ally, and occasionally to elucidate and confirm both its doctrines and its precepts, by such collateral arguments as that faculty is capable of supplying. In the present case more especially, the consideration of a future state is a subject so full of comfort and satisfaction, that the mind of man must necessarily love to dwell upon it; must wish to contemplate it in every point of view; to examine it in every light, whether natural or revealed; to let in conviction from every quarter; and must be soothed and delighted to find that so important an article of belief, on which so much depends both in this life and the next, is perfectly conformable to the natural sentiments of the human heart, and the justest conclusions of the human understanding. This must be the case, even with the sincerest believers. But there are some also (as is but too well known) in every Christian country, who are *not* believers, and yet profess to receive, on the principles of natural religion, the doctrine of another life, and a day of recompence. Now, no one, I think, would wish to deprive even these of their persuasion, on whatever grounds it rests, that they are formed for immortality, and that they are responsible for their conduct here, at the bar of their Creator hereafter. There are other unbelievers (for they are divided into many different sects) who, though not yet convinced of a future state of existence, are willing to listen to the natural and moral evidences in its favor, and to no others. These, surely, it is of great importance, both to society and to themselves, to

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bring, if possible, to the acknowledgment of a future retribution. This acknowledgment will, even on their own principles, bind them down to a course of action very different from that which a contrary persuasion would have been apt to produce; and will, moreover, in all probability, pave the way for their *entire belief* of a religion which they will find so perfectly harmonizing with their favorite oracle, Reason, in this most interesting point, and which professes to give them the most authentic information concerning that unseen world, the reality of which they already admit to have been proved*.

Whereas if, on the contrary, with a view of converting the Infidel to Christianity, and impressing him with a high sense of its dignity and importance, you set out with assuring him that reason gives us not the slightest hope of immortality; that soul and body perish together in the grave, but are both raised to life again at that general resurrection which the Gospel promises; he will assent probably, without scruple, to the former part of your proposition, but will never be persuaded, on the sole authority of a Revelation which he rejects, to listen to the concluding part.

It may therefore contribute not a little, both to the satisfaction of the Christian, and the conviction of the unbeliever, to state, in the first place, with as much brevity and perspicuity as the nature of the enquiry will admit, some of the plainest and most obvious of those proofs of a future existence, which our own reason is capable of suggesting to the mind, and then to proceed to those which arise from the Christian Revelation†.

* That fundamental doctrine of religion (a future state) would, if believed, open and dispose the mind seriously to attend *to the general evidence of the whole*. Butler's Anal. c. 1.

† The substance of this and the two following sermons was written and preached several years ago. The discourse now before us is not, I confess, of that kind which I should have selected for publication. But the progress which the doctrine of *materialism* has already made on the continent, and is now endeavoring to make in this kingdom, induced me to think, that a compendious view of the most intelligible arguments for the immateriality and natural immortality of the soul, as well as of the other principal evidences of a future state, both moral and scriptural, would not be at this time either unseasonable or unuseful. The *young reader*, at least, for whose use

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The first question that naturally presents itself on this subject, is, whether that percipient and thinking agent within us, which we usually call THE SOUL, is only a part of the body, or whether it is something totally distinct from it? If the former, it must necessarily share the extinction of the body by death; and there is an end at once of all our natural hopes of immortality. If, on the other hand, the latter supposition of its distinct subsistence be the true one; it is plain that there will then be no reason to presume, that the intellectual and the corporeal part of our frame must perish together. That fatal stroke which deprives the latter of life and motion, may have no other effect on the former, than that of dislodging it from its present *earthly tabernacle*, and introducing it into a different state of existence in another world.

Now, whatever difference of opinion there may have been among speculative men, either ancient or modern, concerning the specific nature of the human soul; yet in this they have all, with very few exceptions, universally agreed, that *it is a substance in itself, actually distinct and separable from the body*, though in its present state closely united with it. This has been the invariable opinion of almost all mankind, learned or unlearned, civilized or savage, Christian or Pagan, in every age and nation of the world. There is scarce any one truth that can be named, which has met with so general a reception as this. We discover it in the earliest authors extant, both poets and historians; and it was maintained by every philosopher among the ancients (except by Anaximander, Democritus, and their followers*) as well as by all the primitive Christian

these three discourses were principally intended, will here find (what can alone be expected, on so extensive a subject in so short a compass) some general and leading principles to direct his judgment on a question of no small importance; to guard him against too hasty a desertion of the received opinion concerning it; and to prepare him for a more profound and accurate investigation of it, if ever he should feel himself disposed to pursue the enquiry any farther.

* See Cudworth's Intellectual System, vol. i. b. i. c. i. and ii. and c. v. p. 836—841.

Cicero (Tusc. Quæst. l. i. c. 22.) mentions no more than two philosophers, Dicæarchus and Aristoxenus, who maintained that man had no soul; and

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writers, without, I believe, a single exception. Even they who supposed the soul to be material (which was undoubtedly supposed by several Pagan philosophers, as well as by two or three of the Christian fathers) yet uniformly held it to be a substance *distinct from the body*. They supposed it to be air, or fire, or harmony, or a fifth essence, or something of a finer, purer, more ætherial, texture than gross matter; and many of them conceived it also to be immortal, or capable of becoming so. Nor was it only the polished and enlightened nations of Greece and Rome, of Egypt and Asia, that believed man to be a compound being, consisting of two separate substances, but even the rudest and most barbarous tribes, of whom history has preserved any traces. And it is well known, that wherever curiosity, commerce, or the spirit of adventure has extended modern discoveries, this notion has been found existing. It has been found as prevalent throughout the vast continents of India and America, and the various islands of the Atlantic Ocean, and the southern hemisphere, as in every other quarter of the globe*. So general a suffrage of almost the whole human race, in favor of this opinion, is surely a very strong presumption of its truth. It proves it to be no less conformable to the first natural apprehension of the untutored mind, than to the soundest principles of philosophy†. And it will, I apprehend, receive no small confirmation from considering some of the more remarkable operations of the soul itself.

It is evident, that the intellectual part of our frame exercises a superintending and sovereign command over the body. It moves, directs, controls, supports,

he gives their reason for this opinion—*quia difficilis erat animi quid et qualis sit intelligentia*. This principle, if carried to its full extent, would, I am afraid, prove equally that we have no bodies; because, as the greatest of our philosophers, Newton, Locke, &c. have repeatedly asserted, it is full as difficult to comprehend the nature of a *corporeal* as of an *incorporeal* substance. Yet this principle seems still to have no small weight with the patrons of Materialism.

* See all the late voyages to those parts, by Captain Cook and other navigators.

† Omni in re consensio omnium gentium LEX NATURÆ putanda est. Tusca. Quæst. l. i.

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protects, and governs the whole corporeal system. Now, in other cases, we see that the MOVING POWER is something different from the MACHINE it actuates. We are therefore led by analogy to conclude, that the soul is as distinct from the body, as the force of gravity is from the clock which it sets in motion, or the wind that fills the sails, and the pilot that sits at the helm, from the vessel which the one steers and the other impels.

And indeed the soul itself gives, in various instances, very strong indications that this is actually the case. That power which it sometimes exerts, when immersed in profound thought, of abstracting itself, of being *absent* as it were from the body, and paying no regard to the impressions made upon it by external objects; that authority by which it corrects and overrules the reports made to it by the senses, for which it frequently substitutes the conclusions of its own judgment; that facility with which, by turning the mental eye inward, and contemplating itself and all its wonderful operations, in the management of its internal stores, it forms a new set of ideas peculiarly its own, purely intellectual and spiritual*; that vigor which it sometimes manifests in the most excruciating disorders, and even at the approach of death, when its earthly tenement is all shattered and decayed; the essential difference there is between the pains and pleasures of the body and of the mind; the emotions often raised in us, without any external impression, by the eminent virtues of great and good men, in distant ages and countries; the astonishing activity and vivacity, the fertility of invention, and rapidity of transition, which the soul frequently displays in dreams, when the body, and all its senses and powers, are benumbed and locked up in sleep; the variety of unexpected scenes which it then, by a kind of enchantment, raises up to view; the strange and unheard-of persons, places incidents, and conversations, it sometimes creates, totally unconnected with any occurrences of the prece-

* Locke, b. ii. ch. 1. s. 4.

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ding day, and of which not the smallest traces are to be found in the memory; and above all, that astonishing, yet well-attested phenomenon of SLEEP-WALKING, where, though the eyes are insensible to all external impressions, and sometimes entirely closed, yet the SOMNAMBULIST directs himself with unerring certainty through the most intricate windings, and over the most dangerous precipices, and, without any apparent assistance from the organs of sense, has been known to read, write, and compose *; all these circumstances taken together, must be allowed to form a very strong accumulation of evidence, that our thinking part is something more than *mere organical mechanism*, something, in short, *distinct*, and capable of acting *separately* from our corporeal frame†.

It is true, indeed, there are many cases in which the mind appears to be considerably affected by the state and circumstances of the body. But all these appearances will admit as easily a solution from the hypothesis of two distinct essences, closely united, and powerfully sympathizing with each other, as from the supposition of our being one single, simple, uncompounded, homogeneous substance.

If then the preceding remarks have rendered it highly probable that we are endued with a principle of perception distinct from the body; the main point, respecting the capacity of the soul to survive the grave, is established; and, although it may be extremely useful and satisfactory to the mind, yet it is not *absolutely essential to the argument*, to prove that the soul is formed of a *different kind of substance* from the body, or in other words that it is *immaterial*. For even granting for a moment, (what I trust will very soon appear to be inadmissible) that it is nothing more than a system of organized

* See a most extraordinary and well-authenticated instance of this in the Encyclopedie, article *Somnambule*.

† Even *one* of the many circumstances here collected together, viz. the vigor and vivacity which the mind frequently displays, when the body is almost worn out with pain, sickness, and old age, had force enough to convince a celebrated wit, infidel, and libertine of the last century (but who afterwards became a sincere convert to Christianity) that the soul was a substance totally distinct from the body, See *Bp. Burnet's account of Lord Rochester*, 5th ed. p. 20. 21.

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matter; yet, since it is, by the supposition, distinct from the *body*, it does by no means follow, that when the *body* dies, the sentient system will also be dissolved and perish. The same Almighty Being that could superadd to dead matter, so extraordinary and so unlikely a power as that of thought, could also, if he pleased, with precisely the same ease, superadd to it the still further power of surviving the grave. A *material* soul, therefore, may still, for any thing we know to the contrary, be an *immortal* one. But at the same time, it must be confessed, an incorporeal essence bids so much fairer for immortality, and is withal an opinion which has so much better grounds to support it, that I shall intreat your patience, while I just touch as concisely as possible, on a few of the principal arguments which are usually adduced in favor of this doctrine.

It has been repeatedly shown, by some of the ablest philosophers and metaphysicians, that the complex nature, the divisibility, and the inertness of matter, are *totally* inconsistent with perception, thought, consciousness, spontaneous motion, and all the other active and simple powers which evidently distinguish our mental part; that all the possible arrangements, combinations, and modifications of figure and motion, can generate nothing but figure and motion, and that it is just as credible, that the union of a taste and color should produce a sound, as that any thing so totally remote from all resemblance to the properties of body, as intelligence plainly is, should result from the mechanical operations of any corporeal system, however curiously contrived, disposed, or organized.

Arguments of this kind, if unfolded and pursued to their full extent, would afford very satisfactory proofs of an incorporeal percipient. But I forbear leading you further into such discussions; not only because they are unsuitable to this place, and would bewilder us in an endless labyrinth of minute and abstruse investigations, but also for this plain reason; because, after all, it might be said, that, although perception and reflec-

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tion cannot perhaps be the *natural result* of mere matter and motion, yet God certainly may, if he thinks fit, *supernaturally* annex them to a system of organized matter, such as the medullary substance of the brain probably is.

Now it would undoubtedly be presumptous in man to decide with peremptory boldness, what is, or what is not, possible for his Creator to do, and to prescribe bounds to his almighty power; but thus much we may be allowed to say, that Omnipotence itself cannot work a contradiction; and to our weak apprehensions it has very much the *appearance* of a contradiction, to ingraft self-motion, activity, intelligence, volition, consciousness, simplicity, and indivisibility, on a dead clod of earth; on a substance, which if we may either credit our senses, or the sentiments of the most eminent philosophers, is a solid, extended, compound, divisible mass, incapable of changing its own state, and making resistance to motion*. For, refine and subtilize matter as much as you please, yet still it must retain its essential characteristic properties; and it is not very credible that it should have two different sets of properties belonging to it, equally essential, and diametrically opposite to each other. Of such an union as this, we have no instance in nature, nor is there any analogy that can lead us to expect it, or think it possible. Nothing less, one should think, could induce any one to adopt so harsh a conclusion, than the *clearest and most decisive evidence* that there cannot possibly be any such thing as an immaterial substance. But so far is this from being capable of proof, that the actual existence of such substances is a truth which rests on the highest

* The reader will perceive that here, and in other parts of this discourse, I adhere to the received opinion of the *solidity*, *impenetrability*, and *vis inertiæ* of matter. At the same time, I am not ignorant that it has of late been controverted, and a very different system advanced, by men of considerable ability. But, notwithstanding the great ingenuity of their arguments, I must confess myself not very willing to abandon the principles of such men as Locke, Clarke, Newton, Maclaurin, &c. &c.; and perhaps the intelligent reader will be disposed to think this attachment to old opinions, something more than early prejudice, when he has perused with care *Mr. De Luc's Letters Morales et Physiques, tom.* i. *D.* 10, 11, 12, 13, 14; where he will find this very abstruse question discussed, and in my conception decided, with a truly phylosophical penetration, clearness, and precision.

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authority, and is supported by arguments which have never yet been overthrown.

In the very first dawn of philosophy, two sorts of substances, essentially different from each other, were supposed to exist, which were distinguished by the names of MIND and BODY. This distinction was expressly maintained by Plato, Aristotle, and almost all the ancient Theists, from Thales down to Seneca. Many of them held also, that BODY, or MATTER, was in its own nature essentially passive, inert, and incapable of moving itself, and that the only active power in the universe was mind, or incorporeal substance*. This great principle they supposed to be diffused through every part of nature †; they conceive it to be the immediate cause of vegetation, and animal life, and intelligence, and they seem to have thought it impossible that there ever should have been any such thing as motion in the world, had there never been any substance existing in it but matter ‡.

This idea instead of being reprobated by the wonderful discoveries and superior lights of modern philosophy, receives, on the contrary, the amplest confirmation from them. It is well known to be an established principle of this philosophy, to be laid down as the

* Ἰκανωτάτα διώρισται ψυχη των πασων περιουσιαι, γινομενη τε αρχη κινησεως. *Plato de Leg. l.* x. *p.* 952. *Ed. Fic.*

Τῳ μεν ὑλῃ το πασχειν εστι και το κινεισθαι· το δε κινειν και το ποιειν ετερας δυναμεως. *Aristotle de Gen & Corrupt. l.* ii. *c.* 9. *p.* 407. *See also Phys. l.* viii. *c.* 5. *p.* 325. *and Metaphysics l.* xii. *c.* 7. *p.* 741. And in his book de Anim. l. i. c. 2. he gives the opinions of several antient philosophers concerning MIND, of whom the greater part agree in making it the principle of motion.

† See those well-known and beautiful lines in Virgil: *Principio cælum et terras, etc. En. l.* vi. *v.* 724. And again, *Deum namque ire per omnes, etc. Georg.* iv. *v.* 221.

‡ On these principles of the ancient philosophy, is founded the PLASTIC NATURE of the profound and learned Cudworth; and also that hypothesis of the universal dominion of MIND, and the existence *of a distinct, internal, active principle* in every part of nature (not excepting even inanimate substances) which is maintained by the very ingenious author of a book lately published, entitled *Antient Metaphysics*. This system few, I conceive, will be disposed to admit in all its extent; but yet the lovers of antient learning and philosophy will receive from it much curious information; and the advocates for immaterialism will find in it some new arguments for that doctrine well worthy their attention.

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first and fundamental law of nature, that matter is in itself *perfectly inactive*, and incapable of changing the state it happens to be in, whether of motion or of rest; and that consequently all the motion now in the world (unless you suppose it to have been eternal) must have derived its origin from *an immaterial agent*. Nor is this all. Some of the most illustrious disciples of the Newtonian school contend farther, that not only the *origin* of motion, but the *continuance* of it also, requires the perpetual agency of something different from, and superior to, matter. They think it clear to demonstration, that all the great movements of the universe are both produced and carried on by the unremitted exertions of *some immaterial power*; and that the existence and operation of such a power is not only probable but certain, and even absolutely necessary for the preservation of the course and order of nature*. The great Author of nature himself, is confessedly an *incorporeal* being. He was acknowledged to be so by the most sagacious of the antient metaphysicians†; and the most celebrated of the modern, not only thought that the immateriality of the Supreme Being was demonstrable, but that he had himself demonstrated it†.

Assuming it therefore as an undoubted truth, that there is *one* incorporeal Being at least in the world, it follows that there *may be more*. And when we consider by what gradual and easy steps the scale of existence ascends from inanimate matter up to man; and

* See Clarke's Dem. p. 74. D°'s Evid. of Nat. and Rev. Religion, p. 14, 22. 10th ed. And Maclaurin's Account of Sir Isaac Newton's Philosophy, b. iv. c. 9. s. 12, 13. p. 387.

Add to this, what has been asserted, and I think proved, by writers of considerable eminence, that the properties of corpuscular attraction and repulsion, observable in all material substances, and appealed to sometimes as proofs of their activity, are not powers inherent in the substances themselves (which in that case must, in contradiction to an established rule in philosophy, *act where they are not*, that is, at a distance from their own surfaces) but the effects of *some active principle*, entirely distinct and essentially different from matter. Sir Isaac Newton himself seems to have had some idea of this kind in his thoughts. Optics 2d ed. p. 376, 377.

† Arist. Metaph. l. xii. c. 7. p. 742, and Περι Ζωων, p. 944. Nec vero Deus ipse alio modo intelligi potest, nisi mens soluta quædam & libera. Tusc. Quæst. l. i. c 27.

‡ Mr. Locke's Essay on Hum. Und. b. iv. c. 3. s. 6; note p. 167; and b. iv. c. 10. p. 245. 250.

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what an infinite number of creatures of different orders and properties are comprehended within these limits, it is very natural to conclude, that, in the invisible world above us in the immeasurable distance between us and the FATHER OF SPIRITS, there is a far longer series and progression of spiritual beings, each rising above the other in purity and perfection, than of material substances below us. This idea of the invisible world is well suited to our conceptions of the wisdom, power, and goodness of our almighty Creator, and to that grandeur, regularity, order, and harmony, which reign throughout the universe*.

Let us now see the result of this enquiry. It may be drawn into a very narrow compass.

It appears that there are the best grounds for asserting, not only the *possible*, but the *actual*, existence of INCORPOREAL SUBSTANCES.

It is certain also, that such substances are capable of active and intellectual powers; for of such powers, infinitely exalted, is the Supreme Being himself possessed.

At the same time, we see around us *other* substances of a very different nature, which we call *material* or *corporeal*; and which not only evidently appear to our senses to be inert, sluggish, passive bodies, utterly void of sensation, intelligence, and spontaneous motion, but have, by the most diligent enquiries into nature, been pronounced absolutely incapable of those properties.

Now to one of those two classes of substances must that active, lively, conscious, thinking, reflecting power within us, which we call the SOUL, belong. Let reason; let the common sense of mankind determine which of them it is.

On this short simple issue, must the question before us ultimately rest. We leave it to every man to decide for himself, and a plain unbiassed understanding cannot decide wrong.

Difficulties, it must be allowed, there are, attending even the most probable of these two opinions,

* Essay on Hum. Und. b. iii. c. 6. s. 12.

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that of an immaterial soul. But in the apprehension of most men, I believe, they are not to be compared with those that encumber the contrary system. To suppose that the human mind, with all its wonderful faculties and powers, is formed of materials essentially the same with the pebble we tread under our feet; and that a mass of lead, if properly organized, is capable of the sublimest flights of imagination, and of all the various attainments and exertions of the most active, vigorous, and comprehensive understanding; is surely more repugnant to the natural conceptions of mankind, and does more violence to the very first principles of what has been hitherto deemed the soundest philosophy, than any difficulties that may embarrass the doctrine of an incorporeal percipient. Even Mr. Locke himself, who had certainly no unreasonable prejudices against the capacities of matter, and must therefore be allowed to be a very impartial as well as a very able judge of the point now before us; even he, after maturely weighing the arguments and objections on both sides of the question, acknowledges it to be *in the highest degree probable*, that the soul of man is *immaterial**.

We may therefore safely venture to pronounce this opinion to be most consonant to reason and philosophy, as well as to the most received notions of mankind. The necessary consequence of this is, that a man is *a compound being*, consisting of a material body, and an immaterial soul, intimately and vitally united together; each preserving its own powers and attributes distinct, yet acting in perfect concord and harmony with each other. In what manner, and by what means, they are so united, and how two such dissimilar substances can reciprocally influence and act upon each other, is indeed more than we are able

* *Essay on Hum. Und. b.* iv. c. 3. *s.* 6. *Note*, p. 141, *and* 143. Whilst I know, by seeing or hearing, &c. that there is some corporeal being without me, the object of that sensation, I do *more certainly know*, that there is some *spiritual being* within me, that sees and hears. This I must be convinced *cannot be* the action of bare insensible matter; *nor ever could be, without an immaterial thinking being. Ib. b.* xi. *ch.* 23. *s.* 15. *p.* 259,

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to comprehend. But this can never be justly urged against the reality of such an union, unless it be laid down as a maxim in philosophy, that the strength or weakness of our conceptions is the measure of truth and falsehood, and that every thing which we do not perfectly understand is therefore impossible. We can just as easily conceive the connexion and mutual influence of soul and body, as we can explain how the minute component particles of matter cohere so firmly together, as to form what we call solid extension; how the whole process of vegetation is carried on through all its successive stages; how the food of animals is converted into nutriment, and contributes to their support and growth; how finite matter can be infinitely divisible; and how two mathematical lines, indefinitely produced, can be for ever approaching each other, and yet never meet*. When these, and a thousand other truths, equally incomprehensible, yet incontrovertible, in almost every branch of science, and every part of nature, are made perfectly clear and intelligible, it will then be time enough to show how the soul and body are linked together, and rendered capable of acting on each other.

In the mean while, it is evident, that in the wide range of creation there was sufficient room for such a combination as this; and reasoning from analogy, it was natural to suppose that there should be, somewhere or other, such a complex being as man, composed of a material body and an immaterial soul, and thus uniting together the visible and invisible world; just as, in the various orders and gradations of beings ascending up to man, we see that in passing from one class of existence to another, there is always some one species that

* Nous ne savons ni comment nous recevons la vie, ni comment nous la donnons, ni comment nous croissons, ni comment nous digerons, ni comment nous dormons, ni comment nous pensons, ni comment nous sentons. Notre nature, celle de l'univers, celle de la moindre plante, tout est plonge pour nous dans un gouffre de tenebres. *Voltaire. Questions sur l'Encyclopedie*, article *Ame*. p. 176, 190——Is it not astonishing that a man, who could thus frankly acknowledge the inscrutable mysteries of nature, in almost every part of the universe, should yet object to and ridicule the mysteries of Revelation, and consider them as an insuperable bar to the belief of it?

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seems to partake of the nature of both: which is, as it were the link that ties them together, and forms the common boundary between inanimate matter and vegetation; between vegetation and animal life; between animal life and intellect.

This union then of the two constituent parts of the human frame, subsists till it is dissolved by death; which we have no reason to think can have any other effect upon the soul, than that of disuniting it from the body. For the former is, as we have seen, a sentient principle totally distinct from the latter. It *may* therefore continue to exist, and to think, when the body is reduced to dust; and if it be moreover (as we have shewn to be highly probable) incorporeal, it cannot be subject to that decomposition of parts which occasions the dissolution of the body. Our whole corporeal frame undergoes, we know, an entire change, probably more than once, during the course of our lives; yet the soul continues all the while invariably the same. Why then may it not also survive, unaltered, that total change of the body, which is occasioned *all at once* by death, as well as the *gradual* one, which is produced by other causes? The presumption most certainly is, that it will, unless any proof of the contrary can be given, which I conceive it will not be very easy to do*. Our Almighty Creator may undoubtedly, if he thinks fit, by an extraordinary act of his power, put a period even to our immaterial part, when its frail companion dies. But there is no imaginable reason for supposing that he will. The body itself is not totally destroyed by death. It is only reduced to a different state of existence. It loses life and motion, and its organical mechanism is broken in pieces; but its component elementary materials still remain; and there is no instance, as far as we know, of any one particle of matter being annihilated throughout the universe. Why, then, should we imagine that the soul will, after its separation from the body, be deprived of all existence, when nothing else in na-

* See Butler's Analogy, c. 1.

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tere is? To assert, as Lucretius and others have done*, that it cannot exist, or retain perception, thought, and reason, without the assistance of the body, and the organs of sense, is a conclusion too unphilosophical for the present age to admit. In this visible world, indeed, and the state of existence here assigned to the soul, the concurrence and assistance of a certain system of organized matter, are rendered necessary for carrying on, and producing to view its various operations. But to infer from hence, that such a system will be also indespensably necessary in *another* state, in that invisible world which immediately succeeds this, and where there may be various modes of existence totally unknown to us at present, is to affirm, what no human being (unless like St. Paul, he has been caught up into the third heaven) can possibly prove. On the contrary, it has been shown that the actual existence of such a thing as an immaterial, *unembodied*, intellectual essence, is so far from involving any contradiction, that it is by many thought to be *demonstrable*†.

The very nature, then, of the human soul itself, as far as we are capable of comprehending it, gives us the strongest ground to believe that it is immortal. But it ought at the same time to be observed, and it is an observation of great importance in this question, that although the supposition of an immaterial soul surviving the dissolution of the body is, as we have seen, a doctrine in the highest degree probable, and undoubtedly adds no small credibility and force to the other evidences of a future state; yet the great proofs, the great *natural* and *moral* proofs, I mean (for to these only our present enquiries extend) of this most comfortable truth, rest on quite a different foundation; on that firm and immoveable foundation, *the belief of a moral governor of the universe*, infinite in wisdom, justice, goodness, and pow-

* *Lucretius, l.* iii. *v.* 559 *and* 631. Neque aliud est quidquam, cur incredibilis his videatur animorum, æternitas, nisi quod nequeunt, *qualis animus sit vacans corpore intelligere.* *Tusc. Quæst. l.* i. *c.* 22.

† See above, p. 58.

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er. A being such as this, let the nature of the human soul be what it will, can raise it, if he pleases, from any supposable situation after death, to another state of existence, and restore to it that perception of its identity, that consciousness of its former sentiments and conduct, which will render it a proper subject of punishment or reward. Should it therefore appear (as in the two following discourses I trust it will) that from considering the nature and attributes of God, the faculties of man, and the constitution of the world in which he is placed, there are the best grounds for believing that he is *an accountable being*, we may rest assured, that of *whatever materials* his sentient part is composed, Omnipotence will not want the means of placing him hereafter in an *accountable state*.

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SERMON VI.

MATTHEW XXV. 46.

And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

THE arguments advanced in the foregoing discourse, are, I conceive, sufficient to shew, that, as far as we are able to comprehend the nature of the human soul, we have reason to conclude it is a distinct and an immaterial substance, and of course capable of surviving the dissolution of the body. But these, as I have already observed are far from being the only or the most decisive proofs of a future existence. There are other still plainer and more satisfactory evidences of that important truth, discoverable even by the light of nature, which I shall now proceed to open and lay before you.

I. Consider, in the first place, the many excellent faculties of the human soul; the imagination, memory, reason, judgment, will; the vast variety and rapidity of its operations; the power it has of receiving such a multitude of ideas from external objects; of depositing them in the store-house of the memory for many years; of drawing them out again for use whenever it thinks fit; of comparing, arranging, combining, and diversifying them in such an infinite number of ways; of reflecting, meditating, and reasoning upon them; of comprehending such a prodigious number of different arts and sciences; of creating the exquisite beauties and refined delights of music, painting and

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poetry; of carrying on, through a long train of dependent propositions, the most abstruse and intricate speculations; of extracting, from a few plain, self-evident axioms, a demonstration of the most sublime and astonishing truths; of penetrating into every part of the material, the vegetable, the animal, the intellectual world; of conceiving and executing so many wise and beneficial designs; of turning its eye inward upon itself; of observing and regulating its own movements; of refining, purifying, and exalting its affections; of bringing itself, by a proper course of discipline and self-government to bear with patience the acutest pains and the heaviest afflictions: to face with intrepidity the greatest dangers; to restrain its strongest passions; to resist the most inviting temptations; to exert, upon occasion, the most heroic fortitude; to renounce, for the sake of conscience and of duty, all that this world has to give; to abstract itself from all earthly enjoyments; to live as it were out of the body; to carry its views and hopes to the remotest futurity, and raise itself to the contemplation and the love of divine and spiritual things. Consider, now, whether it be probable, that a being possessed of such astonishing powers as these, should be designed for this life only; should be sent so richly furnished into the world merely to live a few years in anxiety and misery, and then to perish for ever? Is it credible, is it possible, that the mighty soul of Newton should share exactly the same fate with the vilest insect that crawls upon the ground; that, after having laid open the mysteries of nature, and pushed its discoveries almost to the very boundaries of the universe, it should on a sudden have all its lights at once extinguished, and sink into everlasting darkness and insensibility? To what purpose all this waste and profusion of talents, if their operation is to be limited to this short period of existence? Why are we made so like immortal beings, if mortality is to be our lot? What need was there, that this little vessel of ours should be fitted out and provided with stores sufficient to carry it through the vast ocean of eternity,

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if, at the same time, its voyage was meant to be confined within the narrow straits of the present life? Instinct would have served for this purpose as well as reason, would have conducted us through the world with as much safety, and with less pain, than all our boasted intellectual endowments.

II. Another presumption in favor of a future state, is *the perpetual progress of the soul towards perfection*, and its endless capacity of further improvements and larger acquisitions. This argument has been set in so strong and beautiful a light, by one of our finest writers*, that it is hardly possible to do justice to it in any other words than his own. "A brute," says he, "arrives at a point of perfection, which he can never pass. In a few years, he has all the endowments he is capable of, and were he to live ten thousand more, he would be the same thing he is at present. Were a human soul thus at a stand in her accomplishments; were her faculties full blown, and incapable of further enlargement; I could imagine she might fall away insensibly, and then drop at once into a state of annihilation. But who can believe that a thinking being, which is in a perpetual progress of improvements, and travelling on from perfection to perfection, must perish at her first setting out, and be stopped short in the very beginning of her enquiries? Death overtakes her, while there is yet an unbounded prospect of knowledge open to her view, whilst the conquest over her passion is still incomplete, and much is still wanted of that perfect standard of virtue, which she is always aiming at, but can never reach. Would an infinitely wise Being create such glorious creatures for so mean a purpose; or can he delight in the production of such abortive intelligences? Would he give us talents, which are never fully to be exerted, and capacities which are never to be filled? Is it not far more reasonable to suppose, that man is not sent into the world merely to propagate his kind; to provide himself with a successor, and then to quit his post: but, that those short-lived generations of rational

* Mr. Addison.

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creatures, which rise up and disappear in such quick succession, are only to receive their first rudiments of existence here, and then to be transplanted to some more friendly climate, where they may spread and flourish; where they may go on from strength to strength; where they may shine for ever with new accessions of glory, and brighten to all eternity* ?"

III. There is, in the human mind, *a constant and a natural tendency towords futurity.* Our thoughts are perpetually wandering from the present moment, and looking forwards to something that is to take place hereafter. Be our happiness ever so great, yet it is not sufficient to gratify and content the soul. There is always a void left in it, which can never be filled up without calling in the aid of futurity, without the anticipation of something more than we at present possess. Whatever may chance to be our ruling passion, whether it be the love of wealth, of power, of honor, of pleasure, we are scarce ever satisfied with that share of it which we enjoy; but are always thirsting and reaching after more, are perpetually forming projects from which we promise ourselves greater satisfaction than any we have yet experienced. There is constantly some favorite object in view, some point to be obtained; and "we are continually hurrying over some period of our existence, in order to arrive at certain imaginary stations or resting-places," where we hope to find that quiet and content which has hitherto eluded our search. We reach those wished-for situations, but "we find no rest for the sole of our feet †." The imaginary horizon of our project flies before us as we advance; no sooner do we gain one eminence, than another instantly appears beyond it; and when that is passed, still others present themselves in endless succession to our view. Thus are we continually drawn on through life with the same delusive expectations. We live upon the future, though the future constantly deceives us; we continue grasping

* *Spectator*, No. 111. The whole of this inimitable paper (of which the substance only, with a few variations, is here given) is highly worthy of the attention of the reader.

† Genesis viii. 9.

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at distant happiness, though it always escapes out of our hands, and go on to the very end, pressing forwards towards some imagined good, with the same eagerness and alacrity as if we had never suffered the least disappointment in our pursuit.

There are two other passions, that respect *futurity*, belonging to our constitution, no less remarkable; and these are, *the love of life*, and *the desire of fame*. The former of these is common to all mankind. There is a natural dread of extinction planted in every human breast. The soul shrinks back with horror from the thoughts of annihilation. It cannot bear the idea of sinking into nothing, and sharing the fate of that body which it used to animate and inform. There may indeed be some men so profligate as to please themselves with the thought of having their whole existence terminated in the grave, and of renouncing all expectation of a future reviviscence. But the reason of this is, not because they have no desire to continue in being, but because they dread *non*-existence less than a *miserable* existence, which, if there be another state, they are sure must be their lot. It is this fear which over-rules their natural love of life. Take away this, and they would be as averse to annihilation as the rest of mankind*.

Akin to this desire of continuing our existence, is the desire of continuing our memory beyond the grave. This was the chief source of all those noble disinterested, and public-spirited actions, which we admire so much in some of the antient Pagans. *We*, indeed, *who know*, that, "if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, "a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens†," and that consequently our name is not the only part of us that shall escape the hand of death,

* This dread of extinction, and passionate love of life, seem to have operated with surprising force on the minds of the antients, and are expressed by them sometimes in the strongest and most emphatical terms. That famous wish of Mecænas, *Debilem facito manu, etc.* which Seneca, who quotes it, justly calls, *Turpissimum votum*, is not the only instance of this kind. Vid. Senec. Ep. 101. and Lipsius's notes on the passage.

† 2 Cor. v. 1.

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have much higher and more powerful incentives to virtuous conduct than the prospect of an ideal immortality. Yet still, ideal as it is, and utterly unworthy to be compared with that substantial and truly glorious eternity which is reserved for us in the heavens, it has notwithstanding no small influence upon our hearts. Nor is this the case only with men of exalted minds and cultivated understandings, but in some degree even with the lowest and most ignorant of mankind. Almost every one is desirous of leaving a reputable character behind him, of being celebrated after he is gone, by the little circle of his friends, for his good sense or his good humor, his charity or hospitality, his honesty or fidelity; and every church-yard we see is full of the little artifices of humble ambition to secure some small portion of posthumous renown. There are perhaps a few, who, during their lives may be, or seem to be, indifferent as to the judgment of posterity concerning them. But yet even these, when they are on the point of leaving the world, are commonly as solicitous as any others to clear up any thing that effects their character, and to guard their memories with all the care they can against misrepresentation and calumny. Although they may have no desire of a *great* name, yet they cannot forbear wishing to have a *good* one, or at least not to have a *bad* one; a clear proof that they are far from being unconcerned about their future reputation. We may therefore safely affirm, that the love of fame is in some degree or other universal. We are almost all influenced by it to do things from which we can reap no present credit or advantage, and of which, perhaps, the world will know nothing till after our decease. When our own times are unjust to us, we appeal to future ages for redress; and we have always some kind friend on whose care and tenderness we rely for the vindication of our conduct, if it should stand in need of it when we are gone.

Taking then together all that has been said on this strong *leaning of the soul towards futurity;* its constant dissatisfaction with present enjoyments, and in-

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cessant pursuit of distant happiness; its strong desire of life and immortality, and its fondness for the good-will and applause of posterity; what shall we infer from this remarkable construction of the human mind? Has a wise and a good God furnished us with desires which have no correspondent objects, and raised expectations in our breasts, with no other view but to disappoint them? Are we to be for ever in search of happiness, without arriving at it, either in this world or the next? Are we formed with a passionate longing for immortality, and yet destined to perish after this short period of existence? Are we prompted to the noblest actions, and supported through life, under the severest hardships and most delicate temptations, by the hopes of a reward, which is visionary and chimerical, by the expectation of praises of which it is utterly impossible for us ever to have the least knowledge or enjoyment *? These suppositions are utterly irreconcileable with our apprehensions of God's moral perfections, and his usual method of treating us. "It is not his way to lead us by illusions and deceits. He has not, in any other instance, given us natural propensities, which he knew at the same time there was no possibility of gratifying, nor filled us with unavoidable apprehensions of what should never come to pass†." Why then should we imagine that he has done so in the case before us, and in that only? Is it not infinitely more reasonable to conclude, that our appetite for immortality has, like all other appetites, its proper means of gratification; that the natural bent and tendency of the soul towards futurity is a plain indication, that to futurity it is consigned; that it is intended for another state of existence, where it will find that satisfaction it looks for here in vain; and where hope will at length be swallowed up in enjoyment?

* It was evidently the opinion of the excellent Archbishop Secker, that we shall in another state be sensible of the regard shown to our characters by those who survive us. He has, I trust, already experienced the truth of his own doctrine. Few men had a greater interest in it than himself. See his Sermons, vol. vii. ser. xviii. p. 403, 404.

† Clarke.

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IV. The same conclusion follows from viewing man on the moral side. That variety of faculties with which he is endowed, and the circumstances in which he is placed, plainly prove him to be *an accountable being*. Human actions are evidently distinguishable into two sorts, between which there is an essential and unalterable difference. Some are naturally right and good, others naturally wrong and evil. God has impressed upon our minds a strong *internal sense* of this difference, together with an approbation of what is right, and a disapprobation of what is wrong. He has also given us reason to direct us, where natural sentiment happens to fail, and, by the joint operation of these two principles, he has clearly intimated to us what course of action he requires us to pursue. Hence arises a plain rule for the direction of our moral conduct. Appetite, passion, temptation, prompt us to transgress this rule; instinct, reason, interest, duty, lead us to conform to it. We have undeniably the power to chuse which side we please; can either give way to irregular desires, or control and over-rule them by superior considerations. Now, if we were to suppose a being, purposely framed in such a manner as to be justly accountable for its proceedings, one cannot imagine any constitution better adapted to this end, than that of man which we have just described. And when to this you add, that there is a SUPERIOR who has a right to call him to an account, a Superior who gave him a rule to walk by, and to whom it cannot be indifferent whether he transgresses that rule or not; who can have a doubt, but that God will in some other state examine into the use he has made of his talents in this?

V. If, from considering man, we ascend to God, the evidence for a future state rises considerably in its importance and strength. If he is possessed of all those perfections which we usually and justly ascribe to him, he cannot but approve virtue and abhor vice, and cannot but give the plainest indications that he does so. His holiness must incline him to love and

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favor the good, to detest and discourage the bad. His justice must naturally lead him to distinguish between his faithful and his rebellious subjects, and to make a wide difference in his respective treatment of them. His wisdom must prompt, and his power enable him to assert the dignity of his government, and the authority of his laws, by rewarding those who observe, and punishing those who transgress them, in such a manner as to convince the whole world, that every human being shall be a gainer by obedience, and a loser by disobedience. Now it is a truth universally admitted, that the virtuous are *not* always rewarded, nor the vicious punished in this world, agreeably to their deserts. For although the natural effect of virtue is happiness, and of vice misery; and although, in general, these effects do follow even here, yet in several instances they most evidently do not. We sometimes see men of the very worst principles and practices going on in a full tide of worldly prosperity, enjoying a large share of every thing this life has to give, riches, honors, rank, power, health of body and cheerfulness of mind, "coming in no misfortune like other folk," and not "plagued" with cares and afflictions "like other men*." On the other hand, we may observe but too often, that the best and worthiest of mankind are destined from their earliest years to struggle with the severest hardships and calamities; with poverty, disappointments, undutiful children, unkind friends, inveterate enemies, perhaps too with strong passions, constitutional distempers, and a depression of spirits, which embitters every enjoyment, and would render the most prosperous condition of life insupportable. Their principles too, and motives, are frequently misrepresented, their purest and most benevolent intentions rendered odious, and those actions which deserve the applause and admiration of mankind, expose them perhaps to the grossest obloquy, persecution, and distress. When the antient Pagans beheld such instances as these, they cried out immediately, Where are the gods?

* Psalm lxxiii. 5.

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Who will ever believe that Providence concerns itself in human affairs? Who indeed will believe it, if these disorders are permitted, without any notice taken of them here, or any intention to rectify them hereafter? Is it possible to conceive that the wise, and righteous, and all-powerful Governor of the universe, will suffer his laws to be trampled under foot, his religion ridiculed and despised, his faithful servants calumniated, insulted, oppressed, and yet never once stretch forth his arm to chastise the bold, triumphant offender, and to recompense the injured helpless man; to vindicate his reputation in the eyes of all mankind; to make his "righteousness as clear as the light, his just dealing as "the noon-day;" and to make him ample amends in another life, for the indignities and afflictions he has undergone in this?

That such a retribution will actually take place, we shall have still further reason to conclude, if we consider,

VI. Sixthly, that the constitution of this world is exactly such as might be expected, if it was to be followed by another.

Supposing a future judgment to be a thing certain and allowed, it would then be natural to imagine, that our situation here would be such as should be a proper trial and probation, and preparation for that future judgment. Now this, we find, is actually the case. This life has every conceivable appearance of being a scene of *trial* and *probation*, intended to fit and train us up, by a proper course of exercise and discipline, for another and a better state of existence. The faculties we are furnished with, and the constitution of the world we are placed in, precisely answer to this idea, and to no other. Good and evil are placed before us, we have a power of chusing which we please, and we know all the consequences of our choice. A system of affections is given us, to excite us to action; a variety of objects is distributed around, to work on these affections; we have opportunities of indulging, and we have motives for restraining, them. We are allured by

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pleasure, by interest, by power, with no other view but to give proof of our moderation, our integrity, our disinterestedness. The provocations, injuries, and affronts we constantly meet with, are so many trials of our temper, forbearance, and placability: the afflictions and calamities of various kinds, which fall to our lot, are only instruments in the hands of Providence to exercise and improve our patience, fortitude, humility, meekness, resignation. Whatever road of life we take, obstructions and inconveniencies, cares and difficulties, quickly start up before us, to oppose our progress, and to render necessary the utmost exertions of our prudence, circumspection, industry and perseverance. Even those irreligious and licentious writings that do so much mischief, give occasion, at the same time, to the friends of religion, to manifest their zeal and their abilities in the defence of insulted decency, and of divine truth. That unequal allotment also of worldly blessings, which is so constant a subject of discontent and complaint, is only a part of the same general plan of moral improvement and probationary discipline. The wealthy and the indigent, the high and the low, the powerful and the weak, are brought together on the same great theatre of action, in order to "provoke one "another to good works," and to be the mutual instruments of drawing forth the good qualities suited to their respective stations. And in the same manner, throughout the whole intercourse of human life, the collision of opposite tempers, situations, employments, interests, passions, and pursuits, strikes out of our souls those sparks of virtue, which would otherwise, probably, never have been called forth to view*.

It is *a fact*, then, which will admit of no dispute, that we are actually *tried*, here, almost every moment of our lives. We ourselves, in common speech, call our afflictions *trials;* and we feel, to our cost, that they are really so. If this be granted, it follows that this world is confessedly *a state of probation;* the necessary consequence of which is, *a state of retribution.* For,

* See Dr. Horbery's Sermons, V. 15.

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it would be as absurd to suppose, that we should be tried, without being rewarded or punished, as that we should be rewarded or punished without giving any proofs that we deserve either. These two things are correlatives, and mutually infer each other. They are evidently parts of the same design, the beginning and the end of one wise plan of government, which we cannot suppose to be left imperfect or incomplete, without arraigning the wisdom and the justice of its divine author. It is not his custom to do his work by halves. Whatever he enters upon he will accomplish. Every thing we know of him, and his proceedings, convince us that he must, and he himself declares to all the world that he will. "When I begin," says he, "I will also make an end*."

VII. Strong as these arguments are in themselves in favor of a future state, it is no small confirmation of them, that there has been a general propensity and inclination in almost all mankind, in every period and every country of the world, to believe the existence of the soul after death, and to entertain some notions, however imperfect and confused, of a future recompence. With regard to the antient Heathens, we have the testimony of one of the greatest men amongst them†, that there was an universal agreement of all people upon the earth, in this great point; and he makes this common consent one of his chief proofs of the immortality of the soul. And from that time to this, amidst all the discoveries that have been made, in every part of the globe, there has never yet, I believe, been found one single nation, however savage or barbarous, that has not had some apprehensions or suspicions of another state of being after this. Even those that are said (though but on very doubtful evidence) to have no notion of a Supreme Being, and to be destitute, not only of religious principle, but also, in some respects, of moral sentiment; yet all concur

* 1 Sam. iii. 12. † Cicero. Tusc. Quæst. l. i.

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in believing the existence of the soul after death*. It is true, indeed, that there were, among the antient Pagans, some sects of philosophers who doubted, and others who denied, a future retribution. But the number of these, in comparison of the whole class of the common people who believed it, was but small. And nothing ought to be concluded against thè prevalence of a natural sentiment, from the fanciful notions of a few conceited sophists; whose pride it has ever been to show their ingenuity in combating the plainest truths, merely because they *were* plain, and to check the voice of reason and of nature, by perplexing subtleties, and unintelligible refinements. But the human understanding left to itself, and free from all artificial bias and constraint, has a very strong propensity to the belief of a future judgment. And, although in the notions both of the antient Heathens, and of our modern savages, concerning it, there is great obscurity, uncertainty, and confusion, with a strange mixture of the most absurd and fabulous imaginations, so as to produce little or no effects upon their hearts and lives; yet still they all tend to evince the natural tendency of the human mind to this opinion. And the happy regions of the Thracian†, the sensual paradise of Mahomet, the elysium of the Greeks, and the pleasant mountains of the Indians, all agree in one common principle, the continuation of our being after death, and the distribution of certain rewards and punishments in another life.

* See Locke's Essay on Hum. Und. b. i. c. 3. s. 9. Robertson's Hist. of America, b. iv. p. 389. Account of Voyages to the Southern Hemisphere, published by Hawkesworth, vol. ii. p. 236—239, 4to. Ist ed. Tillotson, sermon. 174. It is remarkable, that the immortality of the soul is believed by all the savage tribes of America, from one end of that immense continent to the other.

† See Herodotus, l. iv. p. 252, ed. Gronov.

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SERMON VII.

MATTHEW XXV. 46.

And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

I HAVE now given you a general delineation of the natural and moral evidences for the immortality of the human soul, and a state of future recompence; and although each of them, singly considered, cannot be said to be absolutely conclusive, yet, when taken collectively they amount to a very high degree of probability; a degree which would render it the extremity of folly for any one to act (which yet is but too common a case with those who reject revelation) as if it was *a decided point*, that there is no state of existence but the present. How totally opposite such an assumption would be to every dictate of nature and reason, will appear still more evident, if we now very briefly draw together into one point of view the several arguments that have been stated in the two preceding discourses, and then see how the case stands on the two contrary suppositions, that there *is*, and that there is *not*, a future state of retribution.

In the first place, then, if we admit that this life is the whole of our being, what a strange and unaccountable scene of things presents itself? We have in that case an active principle within us, which has every imaginable appearance of being distinct from the body, immaterial, indiscerptible, and indissoluble; yet it turns out to be nothing more than mere

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matter, endued with qualities diametrically opposite to its most essential properties; it is dissolved with the body, and loses all sensation, consciousness, and reflection for ever, in the grave.

We are evidently distinguished from, and raised above, the brutes, by a variety of astonishing faculties and powers, which seem plainly designed for some nobler scene of action than this; yet with the brutes we perish, and all the rich endowments of our minds are wasted on us to no purpose.

We are daily making advances both in knowledge and virtue; we have a large field of improvement, both moral and intellectual before our eyes; yet in the very midst of our progress we are stopped short by the hand of death, and never reach that state of perfection, of which we seem capable, and which we ardently desire.

We are formed with ideas and expectations of happiness, which are everlastingly disappointed; with a thirst for future fame, of which we shall never be conscious; with a passionate longing for immortality, which was never meant to be gratified.

Every part of our constitution shows that we are accountable for our conduct, every remorse of conscience is a proof that we are so; there is a superior, who has given us a rule to walk by, who has a right to enquire whether we have conformed to that rule; yet that enquiry is *never* made.

The world in which we are placed is one continued scene of probation. We appear to be sent into it with no other view, but to shew how we can behave, under all that variety of difficult and distressful circumstances into which, by one means or other, we are continually thrown. Yet our behavior passes totally unregarded. We perform *our* parts, but the Judge who has tried us forgets to perform *his*. Our trial is finished, and no consequences follow; no sentence is pronounced; we are neither rewarded for having acted well, nor punished for having acted ill.

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We conceive ourselves to be the subjects of an Almighty governor, who has given us a system of laws for our direction. Yet he appears to be perfectly indifferent whether we observe those laws or not. His friends and his enemies fare frequently alike. Nay, the former are often punished with the heaviest afflictions, and the latter rewarded with every earthly enjoyment.

There has, in fine, been, from the first ages of the world down to this moment, an almost universal agreement and consent of all mankind in the belief or apprehension of a future state of existence; and yet this turns out to be nothing more than a delusive imagination, though impressed so deeply by nature itself on every human breast.

What now can be imagined more strange and inexplicable; more absurd and inconsistent; more replete with disorder, confusion, and misery; more unworthy the wisdom, the justice, the goodness of the Supreme Being, than the frame of man, and the constitution of the world, according to the representation here given of them?

But when, on the other hand, you extend your view beyond the limits of *this* life, and take in the consideration of *another*, what an alteration does this instantly make in the appearance of every thing within and without us! The mist that before rested on the face of the earth vanishes away, and discovers a scene of the utmost order, beauty, harmony, and regularity. The moment our relation to another world is known, all perplexity is cleared up, and all inconsistencies are reconciled.

We then find ourselves composed of two parts, a material body and an immaterial soul; and the seemingly incompatible properties of matter and spirit instead of being intermixed and incorporated together in one substance, have each their distinct province assigned them in our compound frame, and reside in separate substances suited to their respective natures. But though different from each other, they are closely uni-

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ted together. By this union we are allied both to the visible and invisible, the material and the spiritual world, and stand as it were on the confines of each. And when the body reverts to earth, the soul betakes itself to that world of immortal spirits to which it belongs.

Those extraordinary faculties and powers of the human mind, which seem far beyond what the uses of this short life require, become highly proper and suitable to a being that is designed for eternity, and are nothing more than what is necessary to prepare it for that heavenly country which is its proper home, and is to be its everlasting abode. There they will have full room to open and expand themselves, and to display a degree of vigor and activity not to be attained in the present life. There they will go on improving to all eternity, and acquire that state of perfection to which they are always tending, but have not time in this world to arrive at.

When once it is certain that we are to give an account of ourselves hereafter, there is then a plain reason why we are free agents; why a rule is given us to walk by; why we have a power of deviating from, or conforming to it; why, in short, we undergo a previous examination at the bar of our consciences before we appear at the tribunal of our great Judge.

Our earnest thirst for fame, for happiness, for immortality, will, on the supposition of a future existence, serve some better purpose than to disappoint and distress us. They are all natural desires, with objects that correspond to them; and will each of them meet with that gratification in another life, which they in vain look for in this.

Nay, even that unequal distribution of good and evil, at which we are so apt to repine, and those heavy afflictions that sometimes press so hard upon the best of men, are all capable of an easy solution, the moment we take a future life into the account. This world is then only part of a system. It was never intended for a state of *retribution*, but of *probation*. Here we are

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only *tried;* it is hereafter we are to be *rewarded* or *punished.* The evils we meet with, considered in this light, assume a very different aspect. They are wise, and even benevolent provisions, to put our virtues to the proof; to produce in us that temper, and those dispositions, which are necessary preparations for immortal glory.

Thus does the supposition of a future state clear up every difficulty, and disperse the darkness, that otherwise hangs over this part of God's creation. With this light of immortality held up before us, we can find our way through the obscurest parts of God's moral government, and give a satisfactory account of his dealings with mankind. It is therefore a most convincing proof of the reality of a future state, that it answers so many excellent purposes, and seems so indispensably necessary to give harmony and regularity to the designs of the Almighty in the formation of this globe, and its inhabitants, and to be the finishing and winding up of one uniform and consistent plan of divine conduct. For, as *in the material world,* when we find that the principle of gravitation, upon being applied to the several parts of the universe, explains, in the justest and most elegant manner, the situations, appearances, and influences of the heavenly bodies, and even accounts for all the seeming irregularity and eccentricity of their motions, we make no scruple of allowing the existence and the operation of such a power: so in *the moral system,* when we see that the admission of another life gives an easy solution of the most surprizing and otherwise unaccountable phenomena; and is, as it were, *a master key,* that unlocks every intricacy, and opens to us the great plan of Providence in the administration of human affairs; we can no longer, without doing violence to every rule of just reasoning, refuse our assent to the truth and reality of such a state.

From this collective view of those arguments for a future existence, which are the result of our own researches on the subject, it appears, that when combined together, they form a very strong body of evidence in support of that great truth.

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This evidence has, indeed, as I before observed, been represented by some to be so forcible and decisive, as to render the aid of Revelation on this point totally unnecessary. But so far is this from being the case, that *the very clearness* with which we are now enabled to deduce the reality of a future retribution from the principles of reason, will itself lead us to a very convincing proof of the absolute necessity there was for some superior light to instruct and direct mankind, in this and other doctrines of the utmost importance to their present and future happiness.

It has been shown that in every age and nation of the world, the belief of another life after this, has been strongly and universally impressed on the minds of the common people. It has been shown also, that besides these natural impressions, we may, by a proper exertion of our reasoning powers, and by considering the question attentively in various points of view, draw together a great number of strong presumptive proofs in support of the same important truth. From these premises one should naturally conclude, that all the great sages of antiquity, those wise, and venerable, and learned men, who cultivated letters and philosophy with so much reputation and success, who were the guides and luminaries, the instructors and legislators of the Heathen world, would have been among the very first to embrace the idea of a future retribution; to see more clearly, and feel more forcibly, than any others, the united testimony of nature and of reason in its behalf; to rectify the mistakes and refine the gross conceptions of the vulgar concerning it; to clear away the rubbish with which the fictions of the poets, and the superstitions of the people, had clogged and corrupted the genuine sentiments of nature; and, by delivering, in their writings, a clear, consistent, rational, methodical exposition of this great truth, to establish it for ever in the minds of men, and convert an article of popular belief into a fundamental tenet of the reigning philosophy. This, I say, it was natural to expect frow them; and had they done this, there might have been some pre-

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tence for asserting that there was no need of any further light on this subject. But what is the real state of the case? Look into the writings of the antient philosophers, respecting a future retribution, and (with few if any exceptions) you see nothing but embarrassment, confusion, inconsistence, and contradiction. In one page you will find them expatiating with apparent satisfaction on the arguments then commonly produced for the immortality of the soul, and a state of recompence hereafter; answering the several objections to them with great acuteness, illustrating them with wonderful ingenuity and art, adorning them with all the charms of their eloquence, declaring their entire assent to them, and protesting that nothing should ever wrest from them this delightful persuasion, the very joy and comfort of their souls. In another page the scene is totally changed. They unsay almost every thing they had said before. They doubt, they fluctuate, they despond, they disbelieve*. They laugh at the popular notions of future punishments and rewards, but they substitute nothing more rational or satisfactory in their room. Nay, what is still more extraordinary, although they all acknowledged, that the belief of a future life and a future recompence, was an universal principle of nature; that it was what all mankind with one voice concurred and agreed in; yet, notwithstanding this, many of them seem even *to have taken pains* to stifle this voice of nature within them; and considered it as a *victory* of the greatest importance to subdue and extinguish those notices of a future judgment, which, in despite of themselves, they found springing up within their own breasts. †

What now shall we say to this remarkable fact, this singular phenomenon in the history of the human

* Necio quomodo, dum lego, assentior; cum posui librum & mecum ipse de im mortalitate animorum cæpi cogitare, assensio omnis illabitur. *Tusc. Quæst. l.* i. c. 11. And again, Dubitans, circumspectans, hæsitans, multa adversa ‡ revertens, tanquam ratis in mari immenso nostra vehitur Oratio c. 30.—A most lively picture of the fluctuation and uncertainty of their minds on this subject.

† See Virgil Georg. ii. v. 490. Lucretius, l. i. v. 80. and l 3 v. 37; and Tusc. Quæst. l. i. c 21.

‡ Reverens. *Davis.*

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mind? Can there possibly be a more striking proof that Philosophy, divine philosophy (as it is sometimes called) which is now frequently set up as the rival of Revelation, was in general utterly unable to lead men to the acknowledgment of one of the plainest, and most important, and most *rational* truths in natural religion; that, instead of aiding the suggestions of nature, and confirming the dictates of reason, it perplexed the one, and resisted the other; and that some of the greatest and most learned men of antiquity, exactly answered the description given of them in Scripture; "professing themselves to be wise, they became fools*?" Though superior to all the rest of the world in philosophy and literary attainments, yet in some great points of religious knowledge, they sunk frequently even below the meanest of the people. They ran counter, in short, to the common sense of mankind, and philosophized themselves out of truths, which we *now* see, and which the bulk of men even *then* saw, to be conformable to the most natural sentiments of the human mind.

It was therefore highly proper, it was indispensably necessary, that God himself should interpose in a case of such infinite importance; that Revelation should come to the aid of nature and of reason; should restore them to their original force and power; should rescue them out of the hands of *science, falsely so called* †, whose province, in matters of religion, it has commonly been to *spoil* mankind with *vain deceit* ‡, and to lead those wrong, whom their own good sense and uncorrupted judgment would probably have directed right.

The truth is (but it is a truth which the Freethinker has always been very unwilling to admit) that Christianity has, in fact, contributed very greatly to that improved state, and advantageous point of view, in which natural religion now appears to us; and many of those who reject the *authority* of the Gospel, are, without knowing it perhaps, most certainly without owning it, made wiser by its *discoveries*. In the present instance,

* Rom. i. 22. † 1 Tim. vi. 20. ‡ Col. ii. 8.

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particularly, the divine light of Revelation has thrown a brightness on the distant prospect beyond the grave, which has brought out to view, and rendered more distinct, even *to the eye of reason*, a variety of obscure points, which were before invisible to her unassisted sight. Hence the remarkable difference there is between the reasonings of the antients and the moderns on this question. Hence the force, the clearness, the decision, that appear in the one; the perplexity, feebleness, and uncertainty that distinguish the other. Of this, no other probable cause can be assigned, than that the Pagan philosopher had nothing but the *wisdom of this wolrd* to guide his researches into a future state; whereas the Christian, and even the Deistical philosopher, comes to the enquiry with his mind full of those ideas, which an early acquaintance with Revelation has imperceptibly impressed upon him. To explore a road, which is entirely unknown to us, by a feeble and a dubious light, is a totally different thing from endeavoring to trace it out again by the same light, after it has been once shown to us in broad and open day. The former is the case of the antients, and the latter of the moderns, in respect to a future life.

But besides the benefit derived from Revelation in this respect, there are other advantages, of the utmost impotance, which the Gospel doctrine of LIFE AND IMMORTALITY brings along with it; and which gives its evidences an infinite superiority over those of natural religion.

The principal of these are,

1st. The *certainty and authority* of its proofs.

2dly. Their *plainness and perspicuity.*

3dly. The *nature and duration* of its rewards.

1st. The certainty and authority of its proofs.

After giving every possible advantage to the natural evidences of a future state, it must be acknowledged, that they amount to nothing more than *great probability.* They cannot afford that *demonstrative certainty* and *assurance* of this great truth, which is essentially necessary for the complete satisfaction and comfort of

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the mind, in so very interesting a point, and for rendering this doctrine a motive of sufficient weight to influence the hearts and regulate the conduct of mankind. Neither of these effects could nature and reason (universally as they had diffused the belief of a future existence) produce in the heathen world. This the writings of their philosophers, and the manners of their people, incontestibly prove. To the Gospel alone we are indebted, for the *entire removal* of all doubt and uncertainty on this subject; for raising hope into confidence, and a mere *speculative notion* into a vital and most powerful *principle of action*. It is evident, that nothing less than an express Revelation from God himself could do this. He who first brought us into being, can alone give us *authentic information*, how long that being shall be continued, and in what manner he will dispose of us hereafter. This information he *has* given us in the Scriptures, and has given it in such plain and explicit, and awful terms, as must carry conviction to every unprejudiced understanding, and leave the deepest and most useful impressions on every well-disposed mind.

2. Another benefit we derive from Revelation on this head, is the *plainness and perspicuity* of its proofs. A great part of those evidences of a future state, which reason furnishes, require a considerable degree of attention and consideration, and are therefore better adapted to men of a contemplative, philosophic turn, than to the generality of mankind, who have neither leisure, nor inclination, nor abilities, to enter into long and abstruse disquisitions on this or any other question of importance. But the arguments of the Gospel are (and thanks be to God that they are) of quite a different sort. It sets before us the declarations of God himself, "That there shall be a resurrection of the dead, "both of the just and the unjust; that God hath ap- "pointed a day in which he will judge the world in "righteousness; and that we must all appear before "the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may re- "ceive the things done in his body, according to that

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"he hath done, whether it be good or bad*." To convince us, not only of the possibility, but of the certainty, of so wonderful an event, it appeals to *facts*: it shews us Christ himself, "risen from the dead, "and become the first fruits of them that slept." It afterwards exhibits him to us in a still more illustrious point of view. It represents him as "coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great "glory, to judge the world. The trumpet sounds, "and the dead, both small and great, are raised up; "and before him are gathered" (what an awful and astonishing spectacle!) "ALL THE NATIONS OF THE "EARTH; and he separates them one from another, "as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats. "The books are opened and he judgeth them out of "the things that are written in the books, according to "their works; and the wicked go away into ever-"lasting punishment: but the righteous into life "eternal †."

These are not profound and curious speculations, beyond the reach of common apprehensions. They *are plain facts, and solemn denunciations from the very highest authority*, speaking with equal force to all ranks of men, and, by their simplicity and dignity, adapted no less to the capacity of the illiterate than to the most exalted conceptions of the learned. Hence it has come to pass, that these divine truths being preached to the *poor* as well as to the *rich* (a circumstance peculiar to the Gospel, and therefore mentioned as one of its distinguishing characteristics ‡,) have conveyed to the very humblest disciples of Christ far clearer ideas, and juster notions, of a future state, than were to be found in all the celebrated schools of philosophy at Athens or at Rome.

3. But there is still another point, and that of the utmost consequence, respecting a future state, in which the infinite superiority of Revelation to the light of na-

* Acts xxiv. 15; xvii. 3; 2 Cor. v. 10.
† Matt. xxiv. 30. xxv. 32. 46. 1 Cor. xv. 52. Rev. xx. 12.
‡ Matt. xi. 5.

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ture must evidently appear. And that is, the *nature and duration* of the rewards which it promises.

The utmost that reason can pretend to is, to prove that we shall survive the grave; that we shall exist in another world; and that there the wicked shall be punished according to their demerits, and the good rewarded with such a degree of happiness, as their virtues and their sufferings here seem in justice to require. This is all that is necessary to vindicate the ways of God to mankind; and therefore beyond this, our own reasoning powers, and our natural expectations, cannot go. Indeed the very best and wisest of the Pagan philosophers did not go near so far as this. Some of them, although they believed the existence of the soul *after death*, yet denied that it would exist *for ever**. Others admitted its eternity, but did not allow that it passed into a state of rewards and punishments. They supposed it would be resolved into the UNIVERSAL SPIRIT from which it was originally detached. And even of those who acknowledged a future retribution, many asserted that the punishments only were eternal, the rewards of a *temporary* nature†. And indeed it must be owned, that there are no principles of natural religion, which give us any ground to hope for a state of felicity hereafter, unmixed and perfect in its kind, beyond all conception great, and in duration endless. It is from Revelation only we learn that *such* shall be the rewards "of the righteous; that God "shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there "shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying; "that he will give them glory, and honor, and im-"mortality; that they shall go away into life eternal, "and enter into the joy of their Lord; that in his "presence there is fullness of joy, and pleasures forever-"more; that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nei-"ther have entered into the heart of man, the good "things which God hath prepared for them that love "him‡".

* Stoici—*diu* mansuros aiunt animos, *semper* negant. Tus. Quæst. l. i. c. 13. † Div. Leg. vol. ii. p. 109.

‡ Rev. vii. 27; Rom. ii. 7; Matth. xxv. 21. 36; Psalm xvi. 11; 1 Cor. ii. 9.

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In these, and many other passages of the same nature, we are expressly assured, that both our existence and our happiness hereafter shall be, in the strictest sense of the word, *everlasting*. This, none but God himself could promise, or when promised, fulfil. It is more than the utmost sagacity of human reason could discover, more than the utmost perfection of human virtue could claim. ETERNAL LIFE, therefore, is constantly and justly represented in Scripture as the GIFT, the FREE GIFT of God, through Jesus Christ*; and were it on this account only, it might be truly said, "that life and immortality were brought to light "through the Gospel †."

Mark then, I entreat you, in conclusion, mark the difference between the *wisdom of man*, and *that wisdom which is from above*. The former, as you have just seen in the instance of the antient philosophers, does violence, by its false refinements in some of the most essential truths of religion, to the clearest principles of nature and of reason. The latter illustrates, corroborates, improves, and perfects them. This has been shown to be the case in one very important doctrine, and might be shown in more. Our divine Master is indeed, in every instance, and especially in that we have been now considering, "THE WAY, THE TRUTH, "AND THE LIFE ‡;" and whenever we are tempted to desert this heavenly guide, and to *go away*, either to philosophy or to any other instructor, we have our answer ready prepared for us, in that noble and affecting reply of St. Peter to Jesus, "Lord, to whom shall we "go? Thou hast the words of ETERNAL LIFE: and "we believe and are sure that thou art THAT CHRIST, "THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD ¶."

* Rom. v. 18; vi. 23. † 2 Tim. i. 10. ‡ John xiv. 6. ¶ Ib. vi. 68, 69.

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SERMON VIII.

TITUS ii. 6.

Young men likewise exhort to be sober-minded.

THERE is scarce any subject of exhortation so necessary to youth, as that which is here recommended by St. Paul. Alacrity, emulation, benevolence, frankness, generosity, are almost the natural growth of that enchanting age. What it chiefly wants is something to regulate and temper these good qualities; and to do that is the province of SOBER-MINDEDNESS. Let not the young man be frighted with the solemnity of the name. It implies nothing unsuitable to his years, or inconsistent with his most valuable enjoyments. It tends to improve his cheerfulness, though it may restrain his extravagancies; to give the warmth of his imagination and the vigor of his understanding a right direction; to single out such enterprizes for him as are worthy of his natural vivacity and ardor; to prevent his talents and industry from becoming mischievous, his pleasures from proving ruinous, and to render his pursuits subservient, not only to present delight, but to substantial and permanent happiness.

It is evident that there is both a moral and an intellectual sobriety; a modest reserve, a rational guard upon ourselves, not only in acting, but in thinking: and the original word σωφρονειν, which we translate, *to be sober-minded*, includes both these kinds of sobriety. Its primary signification is, to be wise, prudent, temperate; and this wisdom chiefly consists,

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I. In the government of the passions.

II. In the government of the understanding.

First then, we are commanded to teach young men the government of their passions. "To flee youthful "lusts*," is an apostolical admonition, not very grateful, perhaps, to youthful ears; but so indispensably requisite both to temporal and eternal happiness, that it must, at all events, and by every possible means, be inculcated and enforced. It comprehends all those irregular desires, to the influence of which is owing much the greatest part of the vice and misery that desolate mankind. "From whence come wars and fightings "among you? Come they not hence, even of your "lusts, which war in your members †?" From whence (may we add) come murders, frauds, breaches of trust, violations of the marriage-bed, the ruin of unguarded and unsuspecting innocence, the distress and disgrace of worthy families, the corruption and subversion of whole kingdoms? Come they not all from one and the same impure source, from the violence of headstrong and unruly appetites, which, in pursuit of some unlawful object, burst through all restraints of decency, justice, honor, humanity, gratitude; and throw down every barrier, however sacred, that stands between them and the attainment of their end?

The passions, then, must be governed, or they will govern us; and, like all other slaves when in possession of power, will become the most savage and merciless of tyrants. But at what time shall we *begin* to govern them? The very moment, surely, that *they begin* to raise commotions in the soul; the moment we know, from conscience, from reason, from revelation, that the gratifications they require ought not to be granted. This period may in some be earlier than in others; but it can scarce ever be later in any, than the usual time of being transplanted to this place ‡. Here then you ought at once to enter on the disposition of your studies and the regulation of your desires. There is no danger of your undertaking so arduous and necessa-

* 2 Tim. ii. 22. † James iv. 1.

‡ Cambridge; where this sermon was preached. See table of contents.

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ry a task too soon. If you hope to acquire any authority over your passions, you must inure them to early obedience, and bend them to the yoke while they are yet pliant and flexible. It will, even then, indeed be a difficult task. But what is there worth having that is to be obtained without difficulties? They are inseparable from a state of probation, and youth is the proper time for subduing them. In other instances, the obstructions you encounter serve only to stimulate your industry and animate your efforts; and why then not in this? Be the discouragements what they will, the consequence is not, that you ought to desist from the attempt, but that you ought to begin the sooner. For these obstacles, instead of lessening, will grow upon your hands; every moment you delay, will but rivet your chains the faster, and give habit time to strengthen appetite. Besides, you have here advantages and helps towards this great work, which no other place, no other time, can afford. The retirement you enjoy from the great world, and the admirable order here established, were purposely meant to assist you in the science of self-government, no less than in the acquisition of learning. The exclusion of all the most dangerous allurements to vice, of those amusements which excite the softer passions, of those cares and contests which provoke more violent emotions; the frequent and stated returns of divine worship, the exact distribution of time, the allotment of almost every hour to its proper employment, the necessity of a modest and uniform apparel, of temperate and public meals, of reposing at night under one common roof; all these things are most wisely calculated to keep the attention fixed on innocent and useful objects, to curb the imagination, to restrain extravagant desires, to induce habits of modesty, humility, temperance, frugality, obedience; in one word, SOBER-MINDEDNESS. It may be thought, perhaps, that the regulation of dress, and diet, and amusement, and such-like trifles, are below the notice of a great and learned body. But it is a mistake to think so. Order and regularity in the minutest points, tend to introduce

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them, nay, are necessary to introduce them, in the greatest; accustom the mind to restraint, and insensibly form it to the practice of vigilance and self-denial.

It is, in short, the excellent discipline established in these societies, which is their greatest glory, and must be their firmest support. It is what most eminently distinguishes the universities of Great Britain from all others in the world, and justly renders them the admiration of every one whom curiosity draws from other climes to visit them. This distinction, then, so honorable to ourselves, so beneficial to those we educate, it is of the utmost importance for us to maintain with inflexible firmness and resolution. We cannot, without some hazard, give up the smallest article of good government: but in those points which relate immediately to morals, the least relaxation must tend to subvert our credit, and even endanger our existence. In a place sacred to virtue and religion, no species of vice, no kind of temptation to vice, can, for one moment, be tolerated or connived at. We shall not be allowed to say in our defence, that we only keep pace with the manners of the age: this will be deemed our reproach rather than our excuse. It is *our* business, not meanly "to follow a multitude to do evil;" not to *conform* to the corrupt fashions of the times, but by our precepts and our example to fortify our young disciples *against* them. It is evident that the world expects from us a more than ordinary degree of watchfulness over our conduct. It expects that the correction of national abuses should begin here. And the expectation is not unreasonable. Whence should general reformation take its rise, if ever it rise at all, but from the two great sources of Learning and Religion? We are as lights set on an eminence, shining at present indeed, *in a dark place*, in the midst of luxury and profusion, but able, perhaps, by degrees, to disperse the gloom of the surrounding prospect. If we cannot check the excesses of the present age, we may at least crush future extravagancies in their birth, by infusing into our youth those lessons and those habits of frugality, abstinence, and

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sober-mindedness, which are essential to the welfare both of the universities and of the state.

II. The other great branch of sober-mindedness, which we must recommend to young men, is the government of the understanding.

There is a great variety of intellectual errors, into which, without a proper conduct of the understanding, or, in other words, without a sound and well-cultivated judgment, the young student will be extremely apt to fall. Of these I shall single out only one, against which it seems at present more peculiarly necessary to caution him, and that is an insatiable thirst for *novelty*. The Athenians, we know, in the decline of their state, "spent their time in nothing else but "either to tell or to hear some new thing*". In this respect, whatever may be the case in others, we fall very little short of that elegant but corrupt people; and the greater part of those who write for popular applause, are determined at any rate to gratify this extravagant passion. For this purpose they hold it necessary to depart, as far as possible, from the plain direct road of nature, simplicity, and good sense; which being unfortunately pre-occupied by those great masters of composition, the antients, and such of the moderns as have trod in their steps, leave them no room in that walk for the distinction at which they aim. They strike out therefore into untried and pathless regions, and there strain every nerve, and put in practice every artifice, to catch the attention and excite the wonder of mankind. Hence all those various corruptions in literature, those affectations of singularity and originality, those quaint conceits, abrupt digressions, indecent allusions, wild starts of fancy, and every other obliquity of a distorted wit, which vitiate the taste, corrupt the morals, and pervert the principles of young and injudicious readers†. Hence too all those late profound discoveries—that to give youth

* Acts xvii. 21.

† Certain eccentric compositions are here alluded to, which were at that time (1767) much in fashion, and have as usual produced a multitude of wretched imitators of a species of writing which does not admit, and is not worthy, of imitation.

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a religious education is to fill them with bigotry and prejudice; that the right way to teach morality is to make vice appear amiable; that true wisdom and philosophy consist in doubting of every thing, in combating all received opinions, and confounding the most obvious dictates of common sense in the inexplicable mazes of metaphysical refinement; that all establishments, civil or religious, are iniquitous and pernicious usurpations on the liberties of mankind; that the only way to be a good Christian, is to disbelieve above one half of the Gospel; that piety and self-government are duties not worth a wise man's notice; that benevolence is the sum of all virtue and all religion, and that one great proof of our benevolence is to set mankind afloat in uncertainty, and make them as uneasy and hopeless as we can.

When these positions are thus collected together, and proposed without sophistry or disguise to a plain understanding, they appear more like the feverish dreams of a disordered imagination, than the serious assertions of sober and reasonable men. And yet they are notoriously nothing more than a faithful compendium of what some of the most favorite authors of the age, both foreign and domestic, avowedly recommend to us, as maxims of wisdom and rules of conduct. Were they actually adopted as such by the bulk of the people, it is easy to see what wild work they would make in society. In effect, the recent opportunities we have had in this island, of observing the ridiculous extravagancies resulting from those principles, and the infinite absurdities of a practice formed on the too-prevailing system of modern ethics, are abundantly sufficient to convince us of their utter unfitness for the uses and the duties of common life, as well as for the purposes of the life to come. It behoves us, therefore, to guard our young disciples, with the utmost care, against this visionary fantastic philosophy, which owes its birth to the concurrence of much vanity and little judgment with a warm and ungoverned imagination, and is studious to recom-

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mend itself by the united charms of novelty and eloquence. These are indeed to young minds attractions almost irresistible; but yet a right culture of the understanding will be an effectual security against them; and, with some few improvements, there cannot, perhaps, be a better for that purpose, than the course of study marked out by the wisdom of the university to the youth of this place; and which, to their praise be it spoken, is pursued by them with astonishing application and success.

That judicious mixture of polite letters and philosophic sciences, which is the necessary preparative for their first degree, is admirably calculated at once to refine their taste, enlarge their notions, and exalt their minds. By beginning in the first place with CLASSICAL LITERATURE, and improving the acquaintance they have already made with the best and purest writers of antiquity, they will insensibly acquire a relish for true simplicity and chastity of composition. They will learn strength and clearness of conception, accuracy, order, correctness, copiousness, elegance and dignity of expression. They will find that the most justly approved writers of our own times have formed themselves on those great models; and (as one, who well understood what originality was, expresses himself) they will perceive that, "a true genius is not any bold writer, who breaks through the rules of decency to distinguish himself by the singularity of his opinions; but one who, on a deserving subject, is able to open new scenes, and discover a vein of true and noble thinking, which never entered into any imagination before; every stroke of whose pen is worth all the paper blotted by hundreds of others in the whole course of their lives*.

The cultivation of LOGIC, at the same time, and the most useful and practical branches of the MATHEMATICS (which are excellent examples of severe reasoning and sagacious investigation) will also be of sin-

* Swift's proposal for correcting, improving, and ascertaining the English tongue; in a letter to lord Oxford.

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gular use in preserving our youth from error, in every subsequent part of knowledge. It will teach them to arrange, and methodize, and connect their thoughts; to examine the arguments of others with a nice and critical penetration; to pursue them through a long concatenation of dependent propositions, and discover whether any link in the chain of proofs be wanting; to distinguish sense from sound, ideas from words, hasty and peremptory decisions fom just and legitimate conclusions. It will put them upon their guard against bold and novel opinions, especially if addressed to the imagination by strokes of wit, or to the heart by affecting descriptions, rather than to the understanding by sound and conclusive reasoning. By keeping their judgment in constant exercise, it will improve and strengthen that excellent and useful, but little regarded, faculty. It will instruct them in the several degrees of certainty, and the various kinds of proof, of which different subjects are capable; the just grounds of doubt, assent, or disbelief; the true limits and extent of the human understanding; that precise point, in short, at which our curiosity ought to stop, and beyond which, all is uncertainty, conjecture, and darkness.

The first suitable employment of our minds, thus improved, is to turn their new-acquired sagacity inward upon themselves, and, with the help of the best ethical writers, antient and modern, to make a careful inspection into their own wonderful frame and constitution. This leads us into the province of MORAL PHILOSOPHY; by the aid of which we shall perceive more distinctly the nature and true value of the rational, the social, the selfish principles of action within us, and what tenor of life they point out to us as best accommodated to our circumstances, and calculated to produce the most substantial happiness. By leading young people early into such enquiries as these, many things may be taught them of unspeakable use to themselves and others, and many admirable rules suggested to them for the regulation of their future conduct.

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After this survey of the *moral*, it is time to contemplate the wonders of the *material* world. The great volume of nature is therefore now open upon the student. He is led by the hand of science through all the astonishing and sublime discoveries of the NEWTONIAN PHILOSOPHY. He is made acquainted with the several properties of matter, in all its various forms and modifications, on this globe of earth; and furnished with principles for increasing and improving the conveniences of common life. He is then transported to distant planets and other worlds. He investigates the laws that govern their revolutions, and the forces that retain them in their orbits. "He considers the sun "when it shineth, and the moon walking in bright-"ness*," and all the host of heaven standing in array before him: and sometimes extends his thoughts even beyond these, beyond the reach of sense, to new firmaments and new lights, rising up to his imagination, in endless succession, through the regions of unbounded space. But so far is he from being "secretly enticed†," as some have formerly been, to convert his admiration of these glorious luminaries, into an impious adoration of them, that they serve only, as they naturally should do, to carry him up to their great Author, even the "Father of lights‡." He sees the DEITY plainly written in these splendid characters, he derives from them the justest and most magnificent conceptions of his nature and attributes, and thus lays a firm and solid foundation for the superstructure of NATURAL RELIGION, which forms the next great object of his attention.

In the pursuit of this most important branch of knowledge, he will perceive how far the powers of nature and of reason are capable of going, in establishing those great fundamental truths of religion; the being of a God, a superintending Providence, a moral government of the universe, the essential and unalterable difference between right and wrong, virtue and vice, a future state of existence and of retribution, and the obligations which such a system of things imposes on every

* Job xxxi. 26. † Ib. xxxi. 27. ‡ James i. 17.

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rational agent to conform his conduct to the will of the Creator; as far as it can be collected from the constitution of the world, from the genuine sentiments of nature, the faculties of the human mind, and the attributes of the Deity himself. In these researches, he will find light enough to determine an honest and unprejudiced mind to the belief of all the above-mentioned momentous doctrines, and obscurity enough to make him earnestly wish for clearer evidence, and more authentic information, on subjects of such infinite importance.

After these enquiries, the student's next advance is to METAPHYSICAL SPECULATIONS. These, it must be owned, have been but too often employed in undermining and subverting the clearest principles of morality and religion. But when carried only to a certain point, under the direction of a sound judgment and an honest mind, some knowledge of them may be attended with singular advantages*. It will secure the young student from being caught in the snares which sophists sometimes weave out of those slender materials; will teach him to abstract and generalize, and simplify his ideas; will qualify him to drag out falsehood and scepticism from the midst of those obscure, and intricate, and crooked mazes, in which they love to wander; to detect the endless errors, into which excessive subtilty and false refinement must necessarily lead us; to perceive that a quick understanding may as easily miss the middle point where truth resides, by going beyond it, as a dull one, by falling short of it; and that there are in religion, as in all sciences, certain primary and fundamental truths, which are only obscured by much reasoning, and which, after having been once firmly established, should be laid up as first principles in the mind, where no subtle objections or acute distinctions should be allowed to weaken or destroy their force.

* A verey convincing proof of this we have lately had, in that most masterly piece of reasoning, called *Divine Benevolence asserted*, &c. by Dr. Balguy. Whoever has read this with the attention it requires and deserves, will most earnestly wish that nothing may prevent the learned author from gratifying the public with *that larger work*, of which the treatise we are speaking of is only a small specimen.

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Thus do each of the several branches of learning, which compose the plan of education in this place, contribute something towards the SOBER-MINDEDNESS recommended by St. Paul. And, what is of still greater importance, the fund of knowledge which our youth will probably acquire in the prosecution of these studies, nay even the very difficulties which may sometimes obstruct their progress, will gradually prepare their understandings for the admission of still nobler ideas, and sublimer contemplations. In their pursuit, more especially, of moral and religious truth, they will find, as I before remarked, so much wanting to give complete satisfaction to the mind, that they cannot but see the absolute necessity of some more perfect system of doctrines and of duties, to supply the many defects of natural religion, to strengthen its obligations, to enforce it with proper sanctions, and to give it a vital and effectual influence upon the heart.

Under the impression of such reflections as these, it is obvious that there cannot be a more proper time for carrying the young academic still one step further, and giving him some insight into the nature, the design, the evidences, and the precepts of the CHRISTIAN REVELATION.

But here unfortunately we are obliged to stop. For this most important part of education no *adequate*, no *public* provision is yet made in this university. Revealed religion has not yet a proper rank assigned it here among the other initiatory sciences; is not made an indispensable qualification for academical honors and rewards; has not, in short, all that regard paid to it, which its own intrinsic worth, and the peculiar circumstances at present attending it, seem to demand.

It is well known, that an unbounded freedom is now indulged to the publication of the most licentious opinions; and that these are not, as formerly, confined to bulky volumes of infidelity, or to dull and phlegmatic reasoners; but are dispersed throughout the nation in the most commodious and pleasing vehicles, in works of fancy and amusement, and even useful information,

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which diffuse irreligion almost imperceptibly through the kingdom, and on which men of real genius do not scruple to waste their time and misapply their talents. These are the books most likely to fall into the hands, and to captivate the hearts, of young men of rank and fortune at that very dangerous period of life, when they first leave their colleges to mingle in the great world; and on these, if they have not here been taught sounder principles and better things, they will most probably form their notions of religion, and regulate their future conduct. Add to this that a very great part of those who are bred up among us to the church, and from whose pious labors we must chiefly hope for a remedy to these evils, are frequently obliged, by the straitness of their circumstances, to enter on the ministerial office within a very short time after they have taken their first degree, and are, many of them, immediately engaged in large and laborious cures. If therefore, they have not before this time acquired some tolerable knowledge of their profession, how can they undertake to explain the Gospel to others, and defend it against so many formidable opposers? In the two other learned professions, LAW and PHYSIC, a regular course of study in the theory of each is generally deemed requisite, before those who engage in either think it safe or creditable to venture on the practical part of their business. And it will be difficult, I conceive, to assign a satisfactory reason, why a competent fund of professional knowledge is not equally necessary to the divine, previous to his embarking in the various and laborious functions of his sacred calling; unless it be maintained, that the future salvation of mankind is a matter of less importance than their temporal property or their bodily health.

Does it not then seem highly adviseable for us to turn our thoughts a little more towards this great object than has been hitherto deemed requisite? It is true, indeed, that some acquaintance with the abstruser sciences may be a very proper foundation even for theological learning. But it cannot surely be necessa-

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ry to lay this foundation so exceedingly deep as is here generally done. It cannot be necessary to consume the flower and vigor of the youthful mind, in the very first stage as it were of its literary progress; to occupy it wholly for *three entire years* in these preparatory studies, when it should be going on to the "principles" and elements at least "of the doctrine of Christ*;" should be advancing gradually from the foundation to the superstructure; should be learning under wise and experienced "master-builders," to erect that sacred edifice of divine knowledge, which must be its strong hold and fortress against the many adversaries it will soon have to contend with. If this great work is not carried on to a certain point, during the course of education in this place; when can we hope that it ever will? They who come here with a view to the means, not of acquiring, but of adorning a fortune, no sooner quit this literary retirement, than they engage with ardor in the various pursuits of fashionable life, and have seldom either inclination or leisure for studies of a serious nature. They who are destined to secular professions, or other active employments, find themselves, after leaving this place, so fully occupied, first in learning, and then discharging, the duties of their respective vocations, that they can scarce ever bring themselves to bestow that degree of attention on religious enquiries which their importance deserves. It is here, then, or no where, that this great object must be brought home to their thoughts, and made a part, *an essential* part, of their academic acquirements. And this necessity (as I have already remarked) is still more apparent with respect to those who are sent here to qualify themselves for the pastoral office; whose peculiar province and business it will be to instruct the people committed to their care "in the words of eter-" nal life," and who must therefore never expose themselves to the hazard of that insulting question, "Thou that teachest another, teachest thou not *first* thyself?"

* Heb. vi. 1.

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It must be acknowledged, indeed, and it is acknowledged with pleasure, that in many private colleges, the great outlines of the Christian dispensation are, by the excellent tutors with which this place abounds, explained and illustrated in a very able manner, to their respective pupils. But if there be any weight in what has been here suggested, it will be well worthy of our consideration, whether something more than this is not now become necessary; whether it will not be highly suitable to the dignity, the sanctity of this truly respectable and learned body, to lend the whole weight of their authority to so good a cause; to assist private instructions by *public incitement*; to give some signal *academical encouragement* to this branch of knowledge, something that should make the cultivation of it not only highly reputable but indispensably necessary. And, fortunately for us, the way is easy and open to the execution of any such design. That noble spirit of emulation, which so eminently distinguishes the youth of this place, and pushes them on to the most wonderful attainments in the abstrusest sciences, affords us an opportunity, which no other seminary in the world can furnish, of raising whatever fruit we please from so generous a stock. We have only to make revealed religion *an essential part of university learning*, and assign to it a proper share of the usual honorary rewards, and it will soon be pursued with the same ardor of mind and vigor of application, as all the other parts of literature. The current of study amongst us, which was generally thought to run too strongly towards mathematical subjects, has of late years, by means of the excellent institutions in favor of classical learning, been, in some degree, diverted into another and more useful course. By the method here proposed, (or any other of the same tendency which should be judged more eligible) there would be one more, and that a still nobler channel opened to it: and some few of those many hours, and those fine talents, which are still, I fear, too lavishly wasted here on abstract

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speculations, in the most precious and improveable part of life, would be then more profitably employed in learning the rudiments of evangelical truth; and thereby enabling one part of our youth to preserve their religious principles uncorrupted by the artifices of infidelity, in their future commerce with the world; and the other part to become powerful defenders and successful dispensers of the word of God*.

This university had, in the conclusion of the last century, the honor of giving birth to a stupendous system of philosophy, erected by its great disciple NEWTON, on the immoveable basis of experiment and demonstration; which, by degrees, supplanted and overthrew a visionary though ingenious representation of nature, drawn by fancy, and supported by conjecture. Animated with this success, let it now endeavor to push its conquest still further into the regions of ignorance and error, to banish from the kingdom the extravagant conceits of modern scepticism, no less destitute of all foundation in truth, utility, and sound reasoning, than the philosophical romance of Descartes; and to establish for ever in the minds of the British youth, a religion founded not on "the enticing words of man's "wisdom," but on "demonstration of the spirit and of "the power of God †."

This will be to promote, in the most effectual manner the benevolent purposes of those great and pious benefactors we are now going to commemorate; whose *first object* in these magnificent foundations was, un-

* Since the first publication of this sermon, some advance has been made towards the accomplishment of the Author's wishes. Mr. Norris, a gentleman of fortune in Norfolk (into whose hands some extracts from this discourse happened to fall) left by his will, a few years ago, a rent-charge of a hundred guineas a-year for the establishment and maintenance of a Professor in the university of Cambridge, for the sole purpose of reading lectures to the students there, on the Christian Revelation. To this he added twelve pounds a-year for a medal and some books, as a premium for the best prose English essay on the same subject. It would be a real consolation to the friends of religion, and especially to those whose province it is to examine candidates for orders, if these well-meant institutions, in conjunction with any other subsidiary one which the wisdom of the university might think fit to adopt, should in due time effectually answer the great purposes enlarged upon and recommended in the preceding pages.

† 1 Cor. ii. 4, 5.

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doubtedly, the advancement of religion; who, with a true greatness of soul, carried their views forward into *eternity*, and plainly meant that in these elegant retreats, we should not only lay the foundations of immortal fame on earth, but qualify ourselves for obtaining, through the merits of our Redeemer, a real and truly glorious immortality in heaven.

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SERMON IX.

DEUTERONOMY v. 12.

Keep the Sabbath-day, to sanctify it, as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee.

THE appropriation of one day in seven to the purposes of religion, is a practice peculiar to the Jewish and the Christian revelations. And it is a practice so full of wisdom, utility, and humanity, that it may well be produced as one argument, among many others still more convincing, of their divine original.

By comparing together the primary institution of the sabbath, as related in the Book of Genesis, and the alterations it afterwards received from our Saviour and his apostles, it is evident that the *Chistian sabbath* is to be considered under two distinct points of view.

First. As a day of rest from labor.

Secondly. As a day set apart for the public worship of God.

I. As a day of rest from labor.

This rest was, by the Mosaic law, so rigorously exacted, that the violation of it was prohibited under no less a penalty than that of death*. Our divine Master, in this as well as in many other instances, greatly softened the severity of that law. But yet it was plainly his intention, that there should be *a general cessation of labor* on this day. The original reason for this part of the institution still subsisted in *his* days, and must

* Exod. xxxv. 2.

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subsist till the end of time; namely, that it might be a standing memorial of the great work of creation, from which the Almighty Author of it *rested*, or *ceased*, on the seventh day, and therefore he blessed and sanctified that day for ever. To this Christ himself added another reason, of a similar nature; having on the following day *rested* from the great work of redemption, which he completed by rising from the dead. Our abstinence, therefore from the ordinary occupations of life on the Lord's Day, is a tacit kind of acknowledgment that we were created by God, and redeemed by Christ, and that we are duly sensible of the duties resulting from those relations. It appears, moreover, that our Lord himself very religiously observed the rest of the sabbath; which he no otherwise interrupted than by miracles of mercy and compassion. And we may most certainly conclude, that the very same benevolence of disposition which dictated these humane exceptions, would prompt him also to improve and enforce, both by his doctrine and example, the general rule of *resting* on the seventh day. For never was there any injunction so replete with kindness and compassion to the whole human race, especially to the lowest and most wretched part of it, as this. There cannot be a more pleasing or a more consolatory idea presented to the human mind, than that of *one universal pause of labor* throughout the whole Christian world at the same moment of time; diffusing rest, comfort, and peace through a large part of the habitable globe, and affording ease and refreshment, not only to the lowest part of our own species, but to our fellow-laborers in the brute creation. Even these are enabled to join in this silent act of adoration, this mute kind of homage to the great Lord of all; and although they are incapable of any *sentiment* of religion, yet by this means they become sharers in the *blessings* of it. Every man of the least sensibility must see, must feel the beauty and utility of such an institution as this; and must see, at the same time, the cruelty of invading this most valuable privilege of the inferior class of mankind, and

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breaking in upon that sacred repose, which God himself has, in pity to their sufferings, given to those that stand most in need of it. It was a point in which it highly became the majesty and the goodness of heaven itself to interpose. And happy was it for the world that it did so. For, had man, unfeeling man, been left to himself, with no other spur to compassion than natural instinct, or unassisted reason, there is but too much ground to apprehend he would have been deaf to the cries of his laboring brethren, would have harassed and worn them out with incessant toil; and when they implored, by looks and signs of distress, some little intermission, would perhaps have answered them in the language of Pharaoh's task-masters, "Ye are idle, ye "are idle. There shall not aught of your daily tasks "be diminished; *let more work* be laid upon them, "that they may labor therein*."

That this is no uncandid representation of the natural hardness of the human heart, till it is subdued and softened by the influences of divine grace, we have but too many unanswerable proofs, in the savage treatment which the slaves of the antients, even of the most civilized and polished antients, met with from their unrelenting masters. To them, alas! there was no sabbath, no seventh day of rest! The whole week, the whole year, was, in general, with but few exceptions, one uninterrupted round of labor, tyranny, and oppression.

To these inhumanities the merciful temper of our religion has in a great measure put an end; but there are others, arising from the most shameful intrusions on the sacred leisure of the sabbath, which it has not yet been able to overcome. Look into the streets of this great metropolis on the Lord's Day, and see whether they convey the idea of *a day of rest*. Do not our servants and our cattle seem to be almost as fully occupied on that day as on any other? And, as if this was not a sufficient infringement of their rights, we contrive, by needless entertainments at home, and

* Exod. v. 9. 11. 17.

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needless journies abroad, which are often *by choice and inclination reserved* for this very day, to take up all the little remaining part of their leisure time. A sabbath-day's journey was, among the Jews, a proverbial expression for a very short one. Among us it can have no such meaning affixed to it. That day seems to be considered by too many, as set apart, by divine and human authority, for the purpose, not of *rest*, but of its direct opposite, the *labor* of *travelling*; thus adding one day more of torment to those generous but wretched animals whose services they hire; and who, being generally strained beyond their strength the other six days of the week, have of all creatures under heaven, the best and most equitable claim to suspension of labor on the seventh. Considerations such as these may perhaps appear to some below the dignity of this place, and the solemnity of a Christian assembly. But benevolence, even to the brute creation, is, in its degree, a duty, no less than to our own species; and it is mentioned by Solomon as a striking feature in the character of a righteous man, that "he is merci-"ful even to his beast." He, without whose permission "not a sparrow falls to the ground, and who feed-"eth the young ravens that call upon him," will not suffer even the meanest work of his hands to be treated cruelly with impunity. He is the common father of the whole creation. He takes every part of it under his protection. He has, in various passages of Scripture, expressed his concern even for irrational creatures, and has declared more especially, in the most explicit terms, that the rest of the sabbath was meant *for our cattle and our servants*, as well as for ourselves.

II. But cessation from labor is not the only duty of the Lord's Day. Although it is to be *a day of rest*, yet it is not to be, what too many seem willing to make it, *a day of indolence and inactivity*. There are employments marked out for it of a very important nature; and of these the first and most essential is,

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THE PUBLIC WORSHIP OF GOD.

It is evident, both from reason and Scripture, that public worship is a most useful and indispensable duty. It is equally evident, that if this duty *is* to be performed, some fixed and stated *time* for performing it is absolutely necessary: for without this it is impossible that any number of persons can ever be collected together in one place. Now one day in seven, seems to be as proper and convenient a portion of our time, to be allotted to this use, as any other that can be named. "The returns of it are frequent enough to keep alive the sense of religion in our hearts, and distant enough to leave a very sufficient interval for our worldly concerns."

If then this time was fixed only by the laws, or even by the customs of our country, it would be our duty and our wisdom to comply with it. Considering it merely as *an antient usage*, yet if antiquity can render an usage venerable, this must be of all others the *most* venerable: for it is coeval with the world itself. But it had moreover, as we have seen, the sanction of a divine command. From the very beginning of time God blessed and sanctified the seventh day to the purposes of religion*. That injunction was again repeated to the Jews in the most solemn manner at the promulgation of their law from mount Sinai †, and once more urged upon them by Moses in the words of the text; "Keep the Sabbath-day, to sanctify it, as "the Lord thy God hath commanded thee."

After our Lord's resurrection, the first day of the week was, in memory of that great event, substituted in the room of the seventh; and from that time to the present, that is, for almost eighteen hundred years, it has been constantly set apart for the public worship of God by the whole Christain world. And, whatever difference of opinion there may have been in other respects, in this all parties, sects, and denominations of Christians have universally and invariably agreed. By these means it comes to pass, that on this day

* Gen. ii. 3. † Exodus xx. 8, 9, 10, 11.

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many millions of people, in almost every region of the earth, are at one and the same time engaged in prostrating themselves before the throne of grace, and offering up their sacrifice of prayer, praise, and thanksgiving to the common Lord of all, "in whom "they live, and move, and have their being."

There is in this view of the Lord's Day something so wonderfully awful and magnificent, that one would think it almost impossible for any man to resist the inclination he must find in himself to join in this general assembly of the human race; "to go with the "multitude," as the psalmist expresses it, "into the "house of God," and to take a part in a solemnity so striking to the imagination, so suitable to the majesty of Heaven, so adapted to the wants, the necessities, the infirmities, the obligations and the duties of a created and a dependent being.

That they who avow an open contempt of all religion, and *profess* to live without God in the world, without any belief of his existence, or at least of his providential superintendence; that these, I say, should think it a very needless waste of time to attend divine service, can be no wonder. But that any person who calls himself a disciple of Christ, or even a believer in one Supreme Being, should either totally neglect, or but rarely frequent the public worship of God on that only day which laws, both human and divine, have appropriated to it, is an instance of contempt for the most sacred and most useful institutions, which one should hardly be disposed to credit, if constant and melancholy experience did not too clearly prove the reality of the fact. We see continually that the most trivial pretences of weather, of indisposition, of business, of company; pretences which would not be suffered to interfere one moment with any favorite pursuit, or amusement; are thought reasons of sufficient weight to justify us in slighting the express commands, and deserting the service of our Maker and our Redeemer. And it is greatly to be lamented, that these neglects have generally been observed to be most

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prevalent among those whose education and rank in life should have furnished them with the best principles and the completest knowledge of their duty; whose example is most open to observation, and has the greatest influence on public manners; whose large proportion of worldly blessings demands a more than ordinary warmth of gratitude to Heaven; and whose situation exposes them to such a variety of trying circumstances as require a more than ordinary share of divine assistance*.

But supposing our attendance on the house of God to be such as it ought, there still remains a question of no small importance: How are we to employ the remaining part of the Lord's Day? Are we to dedicate it altogether to private devotion and religious meditation, to seclude ourselves from all society, and to assume an affected gloom of countenance and severity of deportment; or, may we freely give the reins to our inclination for pleasure, and indulge ourselves without reserve in all the usual gayeties and amusements of the other six days in the week? Both these extremes may be seen among different denominations of Christians in foreign kingdoms; and they have each, at different periods, been adopted in this. At the beginning of the last century, *a book of sports and pastimes* for Sundays was set forth, and recommended to the good people of this land by a prince†, who has been sometimes celebrated for his wisdom, but who in this instance certainly was not wise. It gave great, and, it must be owned, just offence to the rising sect of Puritans; who, in the next reign, thinking it impossible to recede too much from the former profanations of the Lord's Day, ran with too much vehemence into the opposite extreme; and converted the most joyful of all festivals into a day of silent, sullen, austere

* It must be acknowledged, indeed, that the present remarkable thinness of our churches on Sundays, at the East as well as the West end of the town (more especially at the time of *evening service*, which is now but too generally given up as quite superfluous) is a proof, that neglect of divine worship is not confined to the great, but has pervaded almost every class of people in this capital.

† James the First.

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reserve, and a rigorous abstinence from every thing that had the smallest tincture of good humor. When all these extravagancies had subsided, and the constitution, both civil and ecclesiastical, recovered its antient form, the Church of England, with that wisdom and moderation which have generally governed its decisions, took a middle course with respect to the observation of Sunday. In conformity to antient statutes and usages, it discouraged all public spectacles and diversions, but allowed the more rational pleasures of society, and the cheerfulness of friendly intercourse and conversation; thus drawing the line, with a discreet and a skilful hand, between the two opposite extremes of pharisaical preciseness, and secular dissipation. This prudent medium has now for many years been preserved among us; but how much longer it will be preserved, seems at present no easy matter to say. The licence of the times, however daring in *other* respects, had hitherto spared the day consecrated to our Maker. But it has now carried its outrages even into that once awful sanctuary. In the very midst of all our dangers and distresses, when it did not seem to be *quite* the time for setting Heaven at defiance, new invasions of the Sabbath have sprung up with surprising effrontery; and we are rapidly departing from that simplicity, sobriety, and purity, in which this holy festival has been delivered down to us by our ancestors. Various places of amusement for the Sunday evening, unknown to former ages, unknown, I believe, to any other Christian country, have been openly announced, and to the disgrace of our religion and our laws, have been as openly frequented*.

But how can we wonder at these strange extravagancies in the lower classes of the people, when they only

* Since this was written, the wisdom of the legislature has, by an express act of parliament, effectually suppressed these nuisances; some of which, from the best and most authentic information, I have reason to believe were nurseries of popery, infidelity, and vice. It is to be hoped, that the same high authority will, at a proper time, proceed to the correction of various other abuses, that still infringe, in a flagrant degree, the rest and the devotion of the Lord's Day, but which it was thought not prudent to include in the above-mentioned act.

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improve a little on the liberties taken by too many of *their* superiors? If they see magnificent gaming-houses erected, and publicly resorted to on the Lord's Day; if they see that pernicious amusement admitted on the same day even into private families; if they see numerous and splendid assemblies disturbing the repose, and violating the sanctity of the Sunday evening, what do we think must be the consequence? Is it not apparent that they will learn from their betters the fatal lesson of insulting the most venerable customs of their country, and the most sacred ordinances of Heaven? that they will soon even *excel* their masters, and carry their contempt of decency far beyond the original examples of it, which made the first impression on their minds?

But apart from these consequences, which are already but too visible, it behoves every man, who indulges himself in any unwarrantable freedoms on the Lord's Day, to consider very seriously, "what spirit he is of," and what the turn of mind must be from whence such conduct springs. If, after having spent six days out of seven in a constant round of amusements, he cannot exist without them even on the seventh, it is high time for him to look to his own heart, to check his greedy appetite for pleasure, and to put himself, without delay, under the direction of higher and better principles. If we cannot give up these follies one day in the week, how shall we bring ourselves to part with them, as at last we must, for ever? Would it not be infinitely more wise and prudent to disentangle ourselves from them by degrees, and to try whether it is not possible to acquire a relish for worthier enjoyments? To assist us in this most useful work, and to put this world, and all its frivolous pursuits, for a few moments, out of our thoughts, was one great purpose of the Christian Sabbath; and it is a purpose for which we of the present times ought to be peculiarly thankful. For a day of rest from diversions, is now become as necessary to one part of the world, as a day of rest from labor is to the other. Let us then give ourselves a little respite, a lit-

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tle refreshment from the *fatigue* of pleasure. Let us not suffer diversions of any kind, much less of a suspicious and a dangerous kind, to intrude on that small portion of time which God hath appropriated to himself. The whole of it is barely sufficient for the important uses to which it is destined, and to defraud our Maker of any considerable part of it is a species of sacrilege.

But how then (you will say) shall we fill up all those dull, tedious hours, that are not spent in the public service of the church? How shall we prevent that almost irresistible languor and heaviness which are so apt to take possession of our minds, for want of our usual diversions and occupations on this day?

Surely it can require no great stretch of invention or ingenuity to find out means of employing our vacant time, both innocently and agreeably. Besides the society and conversation of our friends, from which we are by no means precluded, might we not for a few hours find amusement in contemplating the wisdom, the power, the goodness of God in the works of his creation? And might we not draw entertainment, as well as improvement, from some of the sublimer parts of that sacred volume which contains "the words of eternal life," and with which therefore it surely concerns us to have some little acquaintance?

Or, if more active recreations are required, what think you of that which you may make as active as you please, and which was in fact the supreme delight of our divine Master, *the recreation of doing good?* If, for instance, it be at all necessary (and when was it ever more necessary?) to instil into the minds of your children sound principles of virtue and religion; if you have any plans of benevolence to form, any acts of kindness or compassion to execute; if you have committed injuries which ought to be repaired; if you have received injuries which ought to be forgiven; if friends or relations are at variance, whom by a reasonable interposition it would be easy to reconcile; if those you most esteem and love stand in need of advice, of reproof, of assistance, of support; if any occasions, in short,

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present themselves of convincing the unbeliever, of reclaiming the sinner, of saving the unexperienced, of instructing the ignorant, of encouraging the penitent, of soothing the afflicted, of protecting the oppressed; how can you more profitably, or more delightfully, employ your Sunday leisure, than in the performance of such duties as these; in demonstrating your piety and gratitude to God, by diffusing joy and comfort to every part you can reach of that creation, which was the work of his hands, and from which he rested on the seventh day?

Occupations like these are in their own nature cheerful and enlivening, infinitely more so than that most gloomy of all amusements, which is too often substituted in their room. They are suited to the character of the day. They partake in some measure of its sanctity. They are (as all the amusements of such a day ought to be) refined, intellectual, spiritual. They fill up with propriety and consistency, the intervals of divine worship, and in concurrence with that, will help to draw off our attention a little from the objects that perpetually surround us, to wean us gradually and gently from a scene which we must some time or other quit, to raise our thoughts to higher and nobler contemplations, "to "fix our affections on things above," and thus qualify us for entering into that HEAVENLY SABBATH, *that* EVERLASTING REST, of which the Christian Sabbath is in some degree an emblem, and for which it was meant to prepare and sanctify our souls.

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SERMON X.

1 Cor. i. 22, 23, 24.

The Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified; unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

ONE of the principal causes of the disgust which many persons have taken at the Gospel of Christ, is the very common, but very unfair practice of judging of it by *preconceived expectations*. They are not content to take what God thinks fit to give; to consider what it is that the Christian Revelation really pretends to, what the ends are which it has in view, and how those pretensions are supported and those ends answered: but they sit down and fancy to themselves what kind of religion the Almighty ought to propose, and they should chuse to receive; and then, not finding Christianity correspond to these imaginations, they are disappointed and offended, and reject the offer of salvation made to them, because it is not made precisely in their own way. Many instances of this unreasonable and perverse conduct might be produced from the writings both of ancient and modern infidels. But we need go no farther than the text for a very remarkable one; which will at once confirm the truth of the general position here advanced, and suggest some useful and seasonable reflections.

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Both Jews and Greeks were, it seems, exceedingly offended at *the cross of Christ*, at the doctrine of a crucified Saviour, or deliverer of mankind. But what were the grounds of this great offence? The apostle plainly tells us. The reason was, "because the Jews "required a sign, and the Greeks sought after wisdom." That is, because they had each of them previously settled their notions of the manner in which God *ought* to interpose for the reformation and preservation of mankind; and therefore, whatever contradicted these ideas which they had taken up, would appear to them in the highest degree improbable and absurd.

The Jews, it is well known, by taking in too literal a sense some high-wrought figurative descriptions of the Messiah's spiritual kingdom and glory (especially a very remarkable one in the prophet Daniel*) and by laying more stress on these misinterpreted passages, and the groundless traditions of the Pharisees, than on the plainer and more intelligible parts of the prophetical writings, had worked themselves into a firm persuasion, that the promised Saviour was to be a great and powerful temporal prince. They imagined, therefore, that his first appearance on earth would be suitable to such a character, splendid and magnificent; that he would by a series of victories, or some decisive blow, not only rescue them from the Roman yoke, but even extend the bounds and restore the lustre of the ancient Jewish kingdom.

When therefore, as the text expresses it, "they required a sign," they did not mean any great miracle in general, nor even (as is commonly supposed) *any* kind of sign, without distinction, *given from heaven;* but they meant, probably, that precise individual sign above-mentioned, *The sign of the Messiah coming with visible glory in the clouds of heaven*, with his holy angels round him, and all the other ensigns of celestial grandeur†. This illustrious appearance of their promised deliverer, they considered as so essen-

* Dan. vii. 13, 14.

† See Gerard on the Genius and Evidence of Christianity, p. 177—205.

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tial to his character, so indispensable a mark of his heavenly original, that they distinguished it by the name of the *sign of the Son of Man, the sign of his coming**. And, what is very remarkable, they frequently demanded this sign, even immediately after our Saviour had worked the most astonishing miracles†. The reason of this was, because they thought that no regard was due even to miracles, or to any other evidence, so long as that *capital* and *decisive* one, *that sign from* heaven, on which they had set their hearts, was wanting. And this accounts also for another thing, no less extraordinary, at which some persons have been much surprised and offended; namely, that our Saviour constantly refused to give them the sign they demanded. If this sign, it is said, would have convinced and converted them; why should they not have been gratified with it? The fact was, that they could not possibly be gratified with it; because it was inconsistent with that humble and lowly character, in which for the wisest reasons, God designed, and the prophets foretold that the Redeemer of the world should actually appear. The sign they wished for, was founded on an expectation of his descending visibly from heaven to this lower world with the utmost splendor and magnificence. Whereas it was always intended and predicted that he should be born of an earthly parent; should live in an obscure and indigent condition of life; should be despised, rejected, put to death upon the cross, laid in the grave, and rise from it again the third day. And therefore his almost constant reply, when they asked a sign, was, "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after "a sign, and there shall no sign be given it, but the "sign of the prophet Jonas‡." By which figurative allusion, he meant to signify his own death, burial, and resurrection. This was in effect saying to them, "You ask a sign from *heaven*; but the only sign, I

* Matth. xxiv. 3. 30.
† Ib. xvi. 1; xii. 38. John ii. 18, 19, 20.
‡ Matth. xii. 39; xvi. 4.

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shall vouchsafe to give you will be a sign from the *earth*. Instead of descending from above, as you expect, in visible pomp and triumph I shall rise with still greater triumph from the grave, after being numbered three days with the dead."

Still however they persisted in demanding their favorite sign; and with this false idea of the Messiah's character in their mind, which could never be rooted out, it is easy to see how very ill disposed they must be to receive and acknowledge a humble, suffering, crucified Redeemer. That he was "the son of a carpenter; that he was born at an inn, and laid in a manger; that he eat and drank with publicans and sinners, and had not where to lay his head," these were circumstances of themselves fully sufficient to shock their prejudices and disgust their pride. But when he was moreover betrayed into the hands of his enemies, was mocked, and buffetted and scourged, and at length nailed to the cross; this they must consider as the most undeniable proof of his being an impostor, and would as soon have believed Barabbas to have been their Messiah as him. If, indeed, even then, he would have given them what they wanted, *a sign from heaven;* if he would have come down from the cross, would have made his appearance again, as *from heaven*, with every external mark of celestial magnificence, and restored the kingdom again to Israel, they declared that they would still have believed on him. "If he "be THE KING OF ISRAEL," said they, "let him "now come down from the cross*." let him openly shew his real power, "and we will believe him." He saved others, it is true, he worked many astonishing miracles; but, unless he saved himself too, unless he answered their exalted notions of the Messiah, he could not possibly be the Son of God. His miracles must have been wrought by Beelzebub, and he as little worthy of credit as the malefactors who suffered with him.

Such were the prepossessions which made CHRIST CRUCIFIED A STUMBLING-BLOCK TO THE JEWS. The

* Matth. xxvii. 42.

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prejudices which made him FOOLISHNESS TO THE GREEKS were of a different nature. The Greeks were at that time, when the Gospel was first preached to them, as they had been long before, the polite scholars and the fashionable philosophers of the age. The great business and delight of these men was to speculate on nice metaphysical points, such as, the first principles and elements of things, the nature of the gods, the nature of the human soul, the chief good, the several divisions of virtue, the origin of good and evil, and other subjects of the same kind. In these disquisitions, all that they aimed at was, not to arrive at certainty (for that many of them declared to be absolutely impossible) much less to apply the result of their disputations to any one useful purpose of life; but merely to indulge an insatiable appetite for something *new*, to gratify an idle and vain curiosity, to amuse themselves and others with subtle arguments and acute distinctions, to shew their ingenuity in managing a dispute, in proposing captious and artful questions, in creating doubts and raising difficulties on the plainest points, in refining and explaining away every topic they discussed into perplexity and confusion, and leaving the mind more dissatisfied and uninformed at the conclusion than it was at the beginning of the debate. This they imagined, like many other philosophers in our own times, to be the very perfection of human wisdom; they thought it worthy of the gods themselves; and that of course, whoever came commissioned from Heaven to teach religion to mankind, would teach it in all the forms of the schools, with the subtlety of a sophist, and the eloquence of a rhetorician. It is easy to conceive, then, how exceedingly they must be disappointed, when a new religion was proposed to them, consisting chiefly of a few plain facts, and practical precepts, calculated, not to amuse the fancy, but to reform the heart; delivered without method or ornament, by a set of artless unlearned men, who only related what they had seen and heard, and proved the truth of what they said, not

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by fine-spun arguments, or florid declamations, but in a plain unfashionable kind of way, by sacrificing all that was dear to them, and laying down their lives in testimony to their doctrines. As far, indeed, as those doctrines were *new*, they would be well received. For the Athenians, as we learn from the highest authority, "spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell or "to hear some new thing*." When therefore St. Paul came to Athens, and preached to that celebrated school of philosophy "Jesus and the resurrection," they were extremely ready to give him the hearing, and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we "know what this *new* doctrine whereof thou speakest "is? for thou bringest certain *strange things* to our "ears†." But when they heard what these strange things were, BELIEF IN ONE SUPREME AUTHOR AND GOVERNOR OF THE WORLD, REPENTANCE, AMENDMENT OF LIFE, CHRIST CRUCIFIED AND RAISED FROM THE DEAD, A GENERAL RESURRECTION, A FUTURE JUDGMENT, (*strange things* indeed to the ears of an Athenian) some "mocked him," laughed at the seeming incredibility of what he told them; others said, "We will hear thee again of this matter‡;" not probably with any view of enquiring into the evidence of *facts* (the very first and principal enquiry that was necessary to be made) but of entering into long and learned disquisitions on the nature and the fitness of the truths in which they were instructed. They expected to have all the difficulties relating to JESUS AND THE RESURRECTION, cleared up to them in the most pleasing and satisfactory manner, to have all the reasons on which God acted, laid open before them, and all his proceedings with mankind justified on the principles of human wisdom. Till this were done the doctrine of CHRIST CRUCIFIED would always appear "foolishness to the Greeks." The pride of philosophy, and the self-sufficiency of learning, would never submit to believe that a man who suffered like a com-

* Acts xvii. 21.
† Ib. xvii. 19, 20.
‡ Acts xvii. 32.

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mon malefactor, could be a teacher sent from God; that the death of so excellent and innocent a person could be of any benefit to mankind; that God would make use of means to accomplish his ends, so totally different from those which a Greek philosopher would have fixed on; and that no better and more credible method of instructing and saving the world could have occurred to Infinite Wisdom. The seeming absurdity of all this would shock the Pagan, no less than the ignominy of it did the sons of Abraham. Show us the meaning and propriety of this plan, said the Greek: show us the dignity and splendor of it, said the Jew: prove to us, said the one, the consistency of these doctrines with the magnificent descriptions of the Messiah, by the prophets; reconcile it, said the other, to the principles of reason and common sense.

And in what manner now does St. Paul treat these objections to the doctrine of the cross? Does he go about to accommodate and bring it down to the temper of his opponents? Does he endeavor to palliate and soften, to conceal or pass slightly over, to explain away or apologize for, this offensive article? No such matter. Notwithstanding these well known prejudices against a crucified Redeemer, we find him constantly and boldly, and in the most express terms, asserting that the Saviour whom he preached, whose disciple he was, and on whom he wished all mankind to believe, was put to death upon the cross, and gave himself a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. He well knew how shocking this would sound to some, and how absurd to others; but he persisted in his course; he felt the truth and importance of the fact; and regardless of consequences, he declared it every where aloud and left it to work its own way. "I am not ashamed," says he, "of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power "of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth, "to the Jew first, and also to the Greek*." "God "forbid that I should glory," says he, in another place, "save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Chirst, by whom

* Rom. i. 16.

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"the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world*." And it is evidently in the same strain of triumph and exultation, that he speaks of this doctrine in the text. "The Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek "after wisdom; but we" (regardless of both) "preach "Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling-block, and "to the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are "called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of "God, and the wisdom of God."

The inferences I mean to draw from the preceding observations, are these two that follow:

I. The first is, that the friends of Revelation have no need to be disturbed or alarmed at a circumstance which has been sometimes dwelt upon with expressions of *surprize* and *concern*; namely, that all those virtuous and learned philosophers, who lived in the first ages of the Gospel, and "adorned the times in which they flourished, such as Seneca, the elder and the younger Pliny, Tacitus, Plutarch, Galen, Epictetus and Marcus Antonius, either overlooked or rejected the evidences of the Gospel; and that their language or their silence equally discovered their contempt for the Christians, who had in their time diffused themselves over the Roman Empire †."

The simple fact, that these eminent men did not embrace Christianity, is admitted; and *concerned*, undoubtedly, every compassionate mind must be at so unhappy an instance of perseverance in error; but whoever reflects on what has been said above, will not be much *surprized*, that CHRIST CRUCIFIED should be FOOLISHNESS to the *Roman* sage as well as to the *Greek*. That same philosophy which, we are told, "had purified their minds from the prejudices of superstition," had substituted in their room certain *other* prejudices, that would effectually prevent them from embracing the Gospel, if ever they condescended to bestow a single thought upon it, or to make the least enquiry into it;

* Gal. vi. 14.

† See the History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, vol. p. 516.

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which is far from being certain. Full of system and of science, of the all-sufficiency of reason, the dignity of human nature, and the absolute perfection of Stoical wisdom and virtue, they must needs regard with supercilious contempt an unsystematical and unscientifical religion, first promulged in an unpolished and unlettered corner of the world, by the son of a carpenter, who never studied at Athens or at Rome: preached afterwards by illiterate fishermen and mechanics, and received with eagerness by the illiterate populace. They would never endure a religion that rejected the aid of eloquence and learning, in the pursuit of which they had spent their lives; a religion that laid open the weakness and depravity of the human heart, and the insufficiency of our own powers, either to lead us to a just knowledge of our duty, or support us in the due performance of it, without supernatural aid; which inculcated the necessity of a mediator, a redeemer, a sanctifier, and required the *very unphilosophical* virtues of meekness, humility, contrition, self-abasement, self-denial, renovation of heart and reformation of life; which taught the doctrines of a resurrection from the grave, and an eternal existence in another world, doctrines that appeared to them not only perfectly ridiculous, but even *impossible* *; which "chose the foolish things of the "world to confound the *wise*," (a title peculiarly arrogated by the Stoics) "and the weak things of the world "to confound the things that are mighty †; casting "down imaginations, and every high thing that exal-"teth itself against the knowledge of God, and bring-"ing into captivity every thought to the obedience of "Christ ‡." These were doctrines to which not even a Stoical *slave*, much less a Stoical *Emperor*, could ever submit to listen with any degree of patience. Where then can be the wonder, that, on minds labouring under such strong prepossessions as these, neither the internal excellence, nor the external proofs, of the Christian Revelation, could ever make the smallest impression?

* Acts xvii. 32. Plin. Nat. Hist. ii. 7. † 1 Cor. i. 27. ‡ 2 Cor. x. 5.

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II. The next inference I would offer to your consideration is, that although the doctrine *of Christ crucified* is one of those which are the most offensive to the philosophers and disputers of this world, yet we should not be in the least dismayed by their opposition to it; nor remit any thing of our diligence and earnestness in asserting the truth, and insisting on the importance of this fundamental article of our faith. We have seen that at the very first publication of the Gospel, this doctrine gave the utmost scandal to the pride of the Jew, and the wisdom of the Greek. We have seen too what little regard was paid to them by the great apostle of the Gentiles. The same prejudices do in some measure still subsist; and deserve to meet with the same treatment. There are *Jews* and *Greeks* still to be found in every Christian country. *Unbelievers*, I mean, who in their way of thinking and reasoning on the subject of Revelation resemble both; who are, like the former, shocked at the seeming ignominy of the cross, and, like the latter, disgusted with the absurdity of supposing, that the sufferings and the death of an unoffending individual, and of one too that pretended to be nothing less than the Son of God, could in any way contribute to the salvation of a guilty world. It concerns not us to satisfy these fastidious reasoners. The only proper answer to them is, that our faith "does not stand (and was not *designed* to "stand) in the wisdom of men, but in the power of "God*." All that *we* have to do, is to content ourselves with facts, and to receive with thankfulness the doctrine of Redemption, as we find it delivered in the plain, and express, and emphatical words of Scripture. We may safely trust ourselves in the hands of God, and rely on *his* wisdom for the best methods of redeeming us. His dealings with mankind are truly *great* and *wise*, but he does not conduct himself on the principles of *worldly* grandeur, or *worldly* wisdom. On the contrary, it is plainly his intention, in this and a thousand other instances, to humble, and mortify,

* 1 Cor. ii. 5.

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and confound them both. We have, therefore, no reason to be afraid of either, "for the foolishness of "God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is "stronger than men*."

Artful and ingenious cavillers will attempt to lead us into long disquisitions and subtle speculations on the subject. They will start innumerable difficulties, propose ensnaring questions, and urge us with a variety of seeming absurdities. But, unmoved by all their artifices, let us hold fast the profession of our faith, without wavering, and without *philosophizing*. Unless we are admitted into the counsels of God, it is impossible for us to comprehend *all* the reasons which induced him to prefer that particular method of redeeming us which he has chosen. But yet what we *may* understand of it is sufficient to convince us, that it is admirably well calculated for the purposes which it seems designed to answer; and that although the doctrine of the cross is "to them that perish, foolishness," "yet "to them that are called," that is, to all who are sincerely disposed to embrace the offers of divine mercy made to them in the Gospel, it is, as the text affirms it to be, "CHRIST THE POWER OF GOD, AND THE "WISDOM OF GOD." To enter into the proof of this at large would require a volume. But the slightest and most superficial view of the subject will be sufficient to show, what great, and important, and seemingly opposite ends were answered by the death of Christ upon the cross.

By this extraordinary event, the power of death itself, and the dominion of Satan, "the prince of this world," were, as the Scriptures inform us, at once destroyed†. It gave occasion to that most astonishing miracle, the resurrection of our Lord from the dead. It was a seal and confirmation of the new covenant of mercy between God and man, as covenants used anciently to be confirmed by sacrifices. It was a completion of the ancient prophecies concerning our Saviour, and reconciled that apparent contradiction

* 1 Cor. i. 25. † 2 Tim. i. 10. Heb. ii. 14.

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between the description of his temporal sufferings and his spiritual glories, which so much perplexed and confounded the Jews. It taught mankind that hardest of all lessons (a lesson which is, God knows, but too necessary for every human being in his passage through the world) to bear the cruellest indignities, the heaviest afflictions, and the acutest sufferings, with composure, patience, meekness, and resignation to the will of Heaven. It effected, what of all other things seemed the most difficult, the salvation of repenting sinners, without either punishing them, or weakening the authority of God's moral government; and, while it afforded assurance of pardon for past offences, gave no encouragement to future transgressions. And what completes the whole is, that this *doctrine of the cross*, which by the proud reasoners of that age was called *foolishness*, did notwithstanding make its way in the world with incredible rapidity, and produced such a reformation in the hearts and lives of men, as all the eloquence and subtilty of the greatest philosophers could never accomplish. When we reflect on these things, we must surely allow, that although there may be many things in the doctrine of redemption to us inexplicable, yet it appears plainly, even from our imperfect conceptions of it, to have been a most eminent proof both of the wisdom and the power of God.

The more we examine into it, the more we shall be convinced of this great truth. But as there is now no time for any further enquiries of this nature, I shall dismiss the subject with this one observation—That there is so far from being any thing in the doctrine of the cross that ought to shock our understandings, or stagger our faith, that, on the contrary, it affords us the strongest evidences of the truth of our Saviour's pretensions. He well knew that the Jews expected in their Messiah a splendid victorious deliverer, and that the heathens loved to be amused with philosophical disputes and oratorical harangues. Had he therefore been an impostor, he would most certainly have accommo-

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dated his appearance and his doctrines to these expectations. But by teaching, living, suffering, and dying, in direct contradiction to these deep-rooted prepossessions, he plainly shewed that he depended, not on the favor of man, but on the force of truth, and the power of God only, for the success of his mission. In the same manner, after his ascension, when the Apostles found that the doctrine of *Christ crucified* gave the utmost offence to their hearers, was to the "Jews a stum-"bling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness;" had they acted on the principles of mere worldly policy, they would quickly have changed their tone, would have dissembled, or softened, or concealed this obnoxious article. They would have made use of art and management, similar, perhaps, to that which the Jesuits in China are said to have adopted. It is a charge brought against those missionaries by some writers, and believed by others of considerable authority, that, finding the people of that country exceedingly scandalized at the doctrine of a crucified Redeemer, they thought it prudent to deny that Christ was ever crucified. They affirmed, that it was nothing more than a calumny invented by the Jews, to throw a disgrace on Christianity. And what did they gain by this ingenious piece of craft? Did they secure a better reception for the Gospel, and establish themselves more firmly in the good opinion of mankind? Alas! Christianity no longer exists in China, and they themselves no longer exist as a society. Such are the effects of worldly policy, and worldly wisdom. And had the Apostles acted on the same principles, they would have met with the same success. But *they* pursued the maxims of "that wisdom which is "from above." Undismayed by the offence taken at the doctrine of the cross, they continued to preach *Christ crucified.* They disdained all the little temporising arts of accommodation, all unworthy compliances with the prejudices of mankind. They loudly declared to the whole world that they believed the doctrine of the cross to be a divine truth, and that they thought it their bounden duty to persist in preaching it, without

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fear, without disguise, and without reserve. They were persuaded that God would some way or other take care to prosper his own work, and that, notwithstanding all opposition to the contrary, "their labors should "not be in vain in the Lord." The event showed that their reasoning was just, and that they judged right in obeying God, rather than humoring the prejudices and caprices of men. The successful and triumphant manner in which the Gospel made its way, notwithstanding it went *bearing the cross* of its divine Author, and had all the power, and wealth, and eloquence of the world to oppose it, was an irresistible proof, that it was the design of Providence, not "by the enticing words of man's wisdom, but by demonstration of the Spirit, and of power, to save them that believe; and, by what was called *the foolishness of the cross;* to destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent*."

* 1 Cor. ii. 4. and i. 19.

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SERMON XI.

JEREMIAH xviii. Part of the 11th Verse.

Thus saith the Lord; behold I frame evil against you. Return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good.

WE are now once more assembled together, to humble ourselves before Almighty God* : and, since we first met here for that purpose, a most awful and alarming change has taken place in the situation of our affairs. A few successes in the beginning have been followed by a series of misfortunes. Our dangers and distresses have multiplied on every side. All our efforts to extricate ourselves from the difficulties with which we are surrounded, have proved ineffectual. And the prospect before us is upon the whole sufficiently dark and uncomfortable.

Let us turn our eyes from it to another object; to ourselves I mean, to our own conduct. Will that afford us any consolation? "When the judgments of "the Lord are in the earth," we are told that "the "inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness†." Have those judgments which now press so heavy upon us, taught us this most useful lesson? In proportion as our calamities have multiplied, has the warmth of our piety encreased, and our sins and our follies melted away before it? Twice already have we, in this place, and on this very occasion, addressed ourselves to the Throne of Grace; have, with every appearance of sor-

* On the general fast in 1779. † Isaiah xxvi. 9.

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row and contrition, confessed our sins, and acknowledged that they have most deservedly brought down upon us the heaviest marks of God's displeasure. We have entreated pardon, we have besought compassion, we have implored assistance and protection; and in return have, in the most solemn manner, vowed repentance and reformation. Have that repentance and reformation followed? Has one single article of luxury been retrenched (retrenched, I mean, from principle) one favorite vice renounced, one place of amusement, one school of debauchery or of gaming, shut up? Do we keep a stricter guard upon all our irregular appetites and desires, and restrain them within the bounds of temperance, decency, and duty? Are the obligations of the nuptial vow more faithfully observed, and fewer applications made to the legislature for the dissolution of that sacred bond? Is there a more plain and marked difference in our behavior towards the virtuous and the profligate; and have we set ourselves with greater earnestness to repress the bold effrontery of vice, by treating it, wherever it is found, with the indignation and contempt which it deserves? Are we become in any degree more religious, more devout, more disengaged from this world, more intent upon the next? Are our hearts touched with a livelier apprehension of heavenly things, with warmer sentiments of love and reverence for our Maker; and do we demonstrate the sincerity of that love, by a more exact obedience to his commands, and a more serious regard to that sacred day, which is peculiarly dedicated to his service? Happy would it be for every one of us, could these questions be answered truly in the affirmative. But if they cannot, for what purpose have we again resorted to this solemnity? Do we think that the abstinence, the sorrow, or the supplications *of a day*, will avail us? In a country so enlightened as this is, it is impossible that any one can deceive himself with such imaginations as these. If we come here to say a form of prayer for mere form's sake; if our devotion is put on for the occasion; and put off the moment we leave this place; if we are serious for

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a few hours once in a year, and as dissipated as ever all the rest of our lives; such annual shows of piety, such periodical fits of devotion, instead of being a humiliation before God, are a mockery and insult upon him; and our very prayers will be among the sins for which we ought to beg forgiveness. The prayers to which HE listens, are those only that spring from a broken and a contrite heart: the sorrow that HE accepts, is that only which worketh repentance: the abstinence which HE requires, is abstinence from sin. Unless we renounce each of us our own peculiar wickedness, our professions here do nothing: they do worse than nothing; they add hypocrisy to all our other sins. "This peo-"ple," says God on a similar occasion, "draw near "to me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor "me, but have removed their heart far from me: and "their fear towards me is taught by the precept of men. "Their goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the "early dew it goeth away. When they fast, I will not "hear their cry, and when they offer an oblation, I will "not accept them*. Because I have called, and ye "refused, I have stretched out my hand, and no man "regarded; but ye have set at nought my counsel, and "would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your "calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh. When "your fear cometh as a desolation, and your destruc-"tion cometh as a whirlwind, when distress and an-"guish cometh upon you; then shall they call upon "me, but I will not answer, they shall seek me early, "but they shall not find me; for that they hated know-"ledge, and did not chuse the fear of the Lord."†

All this, I am aware, when applied to ourselves, will be considered by many as nothing more than the usual language of the pulpit; as a little pious declamation, necessary to be used on such occasions as this, but meaning nothing, and calculated only to strike superstitious minds, which see divine judgments in every common occurrence of life.

* Isa. xxix. 13. Hos. vi. 41. Jer. xiv. 12. † Prov. i. 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29.

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This is neither the time nor the place for entering into any controversy on such subjects. We are come here, I apprehend, not to dispute God's moral government of the world, but to acknowledge it. They who do not acknowledge it, have no concern here. Yet even these, when they happen to reflect a little seriously on what we were a very few years ago, and what we now are; when they consider the means by which this sudden and surprising revolution has been brought about; when they look back to the origin, and trace the whole progress, of that unhappy contest, in which we have been so long engaged, find themselves obliged to own, that there is something very extraordinary in it; that it has in many instances gone far out of the usual track of human affairs; that the causes generally assigned, are totally inadequate to the effects produced; and that it is altogether one of the most amazing scenes that was ever presented to the observation of mankind. They allow it is impossible to account in any common way, for every thing that has happened in the various stages of it; and talk much of accident, ill-fortune, and a certain strange fatility (as they call it) which seems to attend even our best-concerted measures. Let those who can, digest such reasoning as this, and disguise their ignorance of the truth, or their unwillingness to own it, under the shelter of unmeaning names, and imaginary beings of their own creation. But let us, who are, I trust, a little better informed, confess, what it is in vain to deny, *that the hand of God is upon us;* that we wanted humbling, and have been most severely humbled. The successes of the last war * were too great for our feeble virtue to bear. The immense wealth that they poured in upon us from every quarter of the globe, bore down before it every barrier of morality and religion, and produced a scene of wanton extravagance and wild excess, which called loudly for some signal check; and that check it has now received. It would be the extremity of blindness not to see, in those calamities that

* That which was concluded by the peace of 1763.

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have befallen us, the workings of that over-ruling power, "which chuses the foolish things of the world "to confound the wise, and the weak things of the "world to confound the things that are mighty; that "no flesh should glory in his presence*." It is plainly the voice of God that speaks to us, in the sublime and tremendous language of Scripture; "Hear this, "thou that art full of stirs, a tumultuous city, a joyous "city; thou that art given to pleasures, that dwellest "carelessly, and sayest in thine heart, I am, and none "else beside me; Though thou exalt thyself as the "eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, "thence will I bring thee down, saith the Lord. Can "thy heart endure, or can thy hands be strong, in the "days that I shall deal with thee? I the Lord have "spoken it, and will do it. I will mingle a PERVERSE "SPIRIT in the midst of thee, I WILL CAUSE THEE "TO ERR IN EVERY WORK†."

Whether we have not thus ERRED, I leave you to judge; and if our errors are here referred to their right source, we know the remedy. It is, God be thanked, in our own hands: it is what this day's solemnity was meant to remind us of; it is what the text itself very distinctly points out to us. "Return ye "now every one from his evil way, and make your "ways and your doings good." Listen then, I beseech you, to this most salutary advice, and "humble "yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that he "may exalt you in due time‡."

But is any one then (we shall be asked) so weak as to imagine, that immediate reformation will be followed by an immediate declaration of Heaven in our favor, and that the moment we become religious and virtuous, we shall be secured from danger, and rewarded with success? The best, indeed the only proper answer to such a question as this, is—MAKE THE TRIAL. It may be made without either expense or

* 1 Cor. i, 27, 29.
† Isaiah xxii. 2; xlvii. 8. Obad. 4. Ezek. xxii. 14. Isaiah xix. 14.
‡ 1 Pet. v. 6.

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hazard; and surely, in our present situation, every thing that affords the least shadow of relief, deserves our notice. Expedient after expedient has been tried, and failed. Above all things, we have tried what IRRELIGION will do for us; and we have no reason, I think, to be proud of the experiment. It is then high time, surely, to discard a physician that has done us so little good, to make a change in our medicines, and put ourselves under a different regimen. And what other regimen can we adopt but that which is recommended to us by the great physician of our souls? It is RELIGION, "pure undefiled religion," that will strike at the root of our disorder, and nothing else can. To see its influence suddenly and universally restored, is more, perhaps, than we can expect. As the depravation of our manners, and the decay of vital piety amongst us, has been a gradual work, the recovery of them must be so too. But let every one begin to do something towards it; let all parties and denominations of men, instead of inveighing against each other, without mercy and without end, reform themselves; and the restitution of religious sentiment, and virtuous practice will not be so difficult an achievement as is imagined. It behoves us, in the first place, the ministers of the Gospel, from the highest to the lowest, to redouble our attention to every branch of our sacred functions, and to take the lead, as we are bound to do, in the great work of reformation. As an indespensable requisite towards it, let us be careful to impress deeply both upon our own minds and those of our hearers, the absolute necessity of faith in Christ, of fervent love towards God, of internal sanctification by his Spirit; and on this foundation, the only solid and substantial one that can be laid, let us erect the superstructure of a holy, religious, Christian life. Let those who direct our public measures remember, that their success must, in a great degree, depend on the purity and integrity, not only of their political, but of their moral and religious conduct; and that "except

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"the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but "in vain*." If therefore they leave the Supreme Governor of the world out of their counsels, and form plans independent of him and his providence, there is but too much reason to fear, that all the efforts of human wisdom and power, the most vigorous exertions of national strength, the best appointed fleets and armies, will avail them nothing; for "the battle is not "their's, but God's†." Let their opponents, on the other hand, be no less attentive to the regulation of their own hearts, than to the conduct of those who govern; and contend with them not merely for the vain distinctions of rank, or wealth, or power, but for that noblest object of human ambition, pre-eminence in virtue. To all this, let those who are distinguished by their birth and fortune, add the weight, the almost irresistible weight, of their example; and manifest their public spirit in the most useful way they can, by letting the light of their truly illustrious conduct "shine "before men," and by being models of every thing that is great and good. Let parents, in fine, while they are so anxious to embellish the manners, and improve the understandings, of their children, pay a little more attention than they have hitherto done, to the cultivation of their hearts. From their infancy to their manhood, let them be brought up "in the nurture and ad- "monition of the Lord ‡." Let those grand corrupters of their unguarded innocence and simplicity, licentious NOVELS, licentious HISTORIES, and licentious systems of PHILOSOPHY, which (not to mention those of our own growth) have constituted a large and most pernicious branch of our commerce with a neighboring kingdom; let these, I say, be for ever banished from the hands of our youth, and in their room, let that long-neglected, and almost forgotten thing, REVEALED RELIGION, make a fundamental part of their education. Let them not be left (as is too much, God knows, the case) to pick it up themselves, as well as they can, from

* Psalm cxxvii. 1. † 2 Chron. xx. 15. ‡ Eph. vi. 4.

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casual information, or a few superficial unconnected instructions; but let it be taught them systematically and methodically; let the first rudiments of it be instilled as early and as carefully into their minds, as those of every other science; let its evidences and its doctrines be gradually explained to them, in the several seminaries of learning through which they successively pass, in proportion as their judgments ripen, and their understandings unfold themselves. Let them, in short, be made not only great scholars, and accomplished gentlemen, but, what is of infinitely more importance, both to themselves and to the public, honest men, and sincere Christians.

By means such as these, together with our most earnest prayers for the assistance of Divine Grace to cooperate with our own endeavors, there is little doubt but a great and a blessed change may in time be brought about, in the manners even of the present generation, and still more of the rising one. And when once the sense of religion is effectually awakened in our souls, we have every reason in the world to expect the happiest consequences from it.

The declarations of Scripture on this head are peremptory and decisive. "At what instant," (says God) "I shall speak concerning a nation, and concern-"ing a kingdom, to pluck up and to pull down, and "to destroy it, if that nation, against whom I have "pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the "evil which I thought to do unto them*." But, besides the reviving hopes which these promises may well inspire, there are other very important advantages that will naturally and spontaneously flow from a sincere belief in the doctrines, and a general obedience to the laws, of the Gospel.

I. In the first place, true Christianity will produce TRUE PATRIOTISM AND PUBLIC SPIRIT. By its commanding influence over the soul, "it will keep under, "and bring into subjection †," all those irregular pas-

* Jer. xviii. 7, 8. † 1 Cor. ix. 27.

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sions which render men rapacious, sordid, selfish, and corrupt, indifferent and inattentive to the public, devoted solely to the pursuit of some favorite object, or the gratification of some implacable resentment, to which they are at any time ready to prostitute their consciences, and sacrifice the true interest of their country. From all these vile impediments to the discharge of our duty, Christianity sets us free, and substitutes in their room, the noblest and most generous sentiments. It gives that dignity and elevation of soul, which is superior to every undue influence, either of popularity or of power. It lays down, as the foundation of all disinterested conduct, that great evangelical virtue, SELF-DENIAL; it teaches us to deny, to renounce ourselves; to throw entirely out of our thoughts, our own prejudices, interests, and passions; and in every public question, to see nothing, to regard nothing, but the real welfare of our country, and that plain line of duty, which no honest man can mistake. To this it adds unbounded love for all, but especially "the brotherhood*;" that is, the community of which we are members. It extends our prospect beyond the present scene of things, and sets before us the recompences of a future life; which, as they make us *richer*, enable us to be more *generous*, than other men. They whose views are wholly centered in this world, will too often prefer the emoluments of it to every other consideration; but they who look towards an inheritance in another state of existence, can *afford* to give up to the general welfare, a few advantages in this.

II. When once we have thoroughly imbibed the true spirit and temper of the Gospel, it will soon produce what is essential to our preservation, UNANIMITY; will compose all those unhappy dissensions which have so long torn the state in pieces; which have been one principal cause of our present evils; and, if not timely extinguished, or at least greatly mitigated, will probably lead (as in all great empires they have universally

* 1 Pet. ii. 17.

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led) to final ruin. Now the source of this dreadful mischief lies where few seem to suspect, in the want of RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLE. Had not all sides departed, in a greater or less degree, from those heavenly precepts of gentleness, humility, meekness, placability, brotherly kindness, moderation, equity, and integrity, which the Gospel prescribes, it is utterly impossible that our divisions could have arisen to their present alarming height. But the misfortune is, we are apt to think ourselves dispensed with, in matters of state, from all those rules of morality, which, in every other case, we deem it our duty to observe; and, what is quite astonishing and unaccountable, the very same persons, who in private life are considerate, reasonable, impartial, good-natured, and humane, will, in public affairs, be impetuous, vehement, acrimonious, censorious, ungenerous, and unjust. On what grounds they establish this strange distinction, and why they conceive all the obligations of Religion to hold good in the one case, and entirely to vanish in the other, is to me, I own, utterly incomprehensible. The Gospel, I am sure, knows nothing of any such exceptions as these. It lays down the same rules of behavior for all men, in all relations, and circumstances of life; and grants no dispensation, in any one supposable instance, from the eternal and invariable laws of evangelical rectitude. It is CHARITY, in short, true Christian Charity, diffusing itself through our whole conduct, public as well as private, that can alone restore harmony and union to this distracted kingdom. Let her mild conciliating voice be once heard and attended to by all ranks of men, and she will say to their ruffled passions, as our Saviour did to the troubled waves, "Peace, be still:" and the consequence will be the same: "there will be a great calm*."

Lastly, A consciousness of having discharged our duty, of being at peace with God, and of living under his gracious superintendence, will give us a SPIRIT, A FIRMNESS, AND INTREPIDITY OF SOUL, which nothing else can inspire.

* Mark iv. 39.

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VALOR indeed, it has been said, is no Christian virtue; and it is very true; for, considered simply in itself, it is no virtue at all. It is a mere personal quality, depending principally on constitution and natural temperament, but improved by education, discipline, and habit; and can be no otherwise moral or immoral, than as it is well or ill directed. But supposing all other circumstances equal, the sincere Christian will have many incitements to face danger with a steady countenance, which the irreligious cannot have. Under the defence of the Most High, he has less cause to fear the worst, and more reason to hope the best, than those that live without God in the world. "The wicked therefore flee when no man pursueth, but the "righteous are bold as a lion*." Even death itself has to the real Christian, no terrors. The only sting it has, is sin, and of that sting he has disarmed it. Instead of being to him, as it is to the worldly man, the extinction of his hopes, it is the consummation of them, and puts him in possession of those heavenly treasures on which his heart is fixed. He therefore goes on with cool undaunted composure to the discharge of his duty, whatever difficulties, whatever dangers, may stand in his way; conscious that he is acting under the eye of an Almighty Being, who can both protect and reward him; who has commanded him, if it be necessary, "to lay down his life for his brethren†;" and who will never suffer him to be a loser in the end, even by that last and greatest sacrifice to the public good.

Such are the effects, the genuine and natural effects, of RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLE on the human mind. It will give us, as we have seen, every thing which our present situation seems more peculiarly to require; PUBLIC SPIRIT, UNANIMITY, AND UNSHAKEN FORTITUDE. Embrace then, with thankfulness, the support which Chistianity offers you, and which you have hitherto sought elsewhere in vain. Amidst so many

* Prov. xxviii. 1. † 1 John iii. 16.

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enemies, take care to secure, at least, one friend. By obedience to the Divine laws, recommend yourselves to the Divine protection; and then remember those most comfortable expressions of the Almighty to another people: "How can I give thee up, Ephraim? "my soul is turned within me. I will not execute "the fierceness of my anger; for I am God, and not "man*." "In a little wrath I hid my face from thee "for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I "have mercy on thee†."

* Hos. xi. 8, 9. † Is. liv. 8.

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SERMON XII.

MATTH. x. 34.

Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword.

WE may, without the smallest hesitation, conclude, that the words of the text cannot possibly have that signification which, at the first view, and as they here stand single and unconnected, they appear to have. It would be the extremity of weakness to suppose, that he whose whole life and doctrine breathed nothing but peace and gentleness, and who declared at another time, in the most positive terms, that "he came not to destroy men's lives, but to save "them *," should here mean to denounce war and desolation to the human species. And that, in fact, this is not the real import of the words before us, will be evident to any one who considers, with the least degree of attention, the whole passage from which they were taken, and the occasion on which they were spoken. It will be evident that they relate solely to the *first preachers of the Gospel*, to whom our Lord was then delivering their evangelical commission; and were intended to apprize them of the calamities and persecutions to which the execution of that commission would infallibly expose them. "They were sent forth "as sheep among wolves; they were to be delivered "up to the councils, to be scourged in the synagogues, "to be brought before governors and kings, to be

* Luke ix. 56.

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"hated of all men for Christ's sake *:" a treatment so totally opposite to that which their early prejudices led them to expect under the Messiah, THE PRINCE OF PEACE †, that it was highly necessary to set them right in this important point; and to forewarn them in plain terms, that although the *ultimate* effect of Christianty would indeed be PEACE in its utmost extent, and in every sense of the word, yet that to those who were charged with the first promulgation of the Gospel, it would bring not *peace*, but a *sword*.

But whatever interpretation may be given to these words, say the adversaries of our faith, they are eventually applicable to Christianity in their most obvious meaning. The Gospel did in fact *send a sword*, and a most destructive one, upon earth. It has deluged the world with blood. It has been the parent of as much misery and devastation, as if it had been purposely intended to harass and torment mankind, and has given rise to more dissensions, wars, and massacres, than any other single cause that can be named ‡.

This it must be owned, is a formidable charge. But formidable as it is, and heightened, as it seldom fails to be, with all the invidious colorings of false rhetoric and false wit, we need not fear to meet it in its full force. It will, I apprehend, be no difficult matter to convince every dispassionate enquirer, that when it is examined more closely and minutely, when it is divested of all the adventitious terrors with which it has been so industriously surrounded, and when all the abatements and deductions are made, which truth demands and candor must admit, it will be reduced to an objection of little or no importance.

I. Whenever the cruelties exercised by Christians against unbelievers, or against each other, are men-

* Matth. x. 16—22. † Isaiah ix. 6.

‡ This argument is so great a favorite with all our philosophical sceptics, that it is every day dressed up in some new form, and repeated incessantly with an air of peculiar triumph and exultation. It is indeed in its very nature calculated to strike more generally, and to make deeper impressions, than any abstract reasoning; and has, I believe, in fact, created stronger prejudice against the Gospel, than all the other cavils of infidelity put together. For these reasons it seemed to deserve particular consideration.

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tioned, it is generally insinuated at the same time, that they are not to be paralleled in any other religious persuasion, and that it was Christianity which first introduced the detestable practice of persecuting on account of religion. But how unfair such representations are, the most superficial acquaintance with history is sufficient to convince us. From the remotest ages down to the present, men of almost every sect and persuasion have treated those of contrary sentiments with no small degree of bitterness and inhumanity. It is well known, that Jews, Pagans, and Mahometans, have each in their turn made use of violence and coercion in matters of religion; and that the early Christians suffered the severest persecution from the two former, long before they began to inflict it on others. This indeed is no vindication of those Christians that had recourse to it; nor is it intended as such. Nothing ever *can* vindicate or justify them. But it may serve to show that others ought to bear a large share of that odium which is generally thrown exclusively on the disciples of Christ; and that it is not Christianity, but human nature, that is chargeable with the guilt of persecution*. The truth is, religion, or *the pretence* of religion, has in almost all ages and all nations, been *one* cause, among many others, of those numberless dissensions and disputes which have laid waste the species: and although it may be matter of surprize to some, and of indignation to all, that what was intended for the protection and solace of mankind, should be

* Even Pagans have persecuted Pagans on the score of religion, with the utmost bitterness and rancor. Besides the memorable instance of Socrates, and the several *holy or sacred wars* among the Grecian States, which had *some mixture* of superstitious zeal in them, we find that in Egypt the worship of different deities produced the most implacable hatred and most sanguinary contests between their respective votaries; that in Persia the diciples of every other religion except that of Zoroaster were punished, and almost exterminated, with the utmost cruelty; and that in later times the kings of Siam and Pegu contended for the honor of possessing a certain sacred relique, (of a nature too contemptible to be named here) with as much fury and obstinacy, as if the safety of their whole kingdoms, and every thing valuable to them, had been at stake. See *Plutarch in Solon. Thucyd. l.* i. *Juvenal Sat.* xv. *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, vol.* i. *p.* 208. *and Mickle's translation of the Lusiad of Camoens, Introduct. p.* 94. *note.*

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converted to their destruction, yet it may be accounted for on the most common principles of human conduct.

The attachment of men to any particular object, will always increase according to the real or supposed value of that object; and their zeal in defending it from injury or corruption, will rise in the same proportion. Hence religion, which has ever been esteemed the most important of all human concerns, has for that very reason given the keenest edge to human resentments, and has wound up the passions of men to a degree of phrenzy, to which no motive less weighty was capable of raising them. And yet, at the same time, if we compare the dissensions and cruelties occasioned by *civil zeal*, with those occasioned by *religious zeal*, we shall find the latter to bear a much less proportion to the former than is generally imagined, and frequently insinuated*. By far the greatest number of wars, as well as the longest, most obstinate, most extensive, and most sanguinary wars we know of, have been owing to causes *purely political*, and those too sometimes of the most trifling nature; and if we can allow men to harass and destroy one another for a mere point of honor, or a few acres of land, why should we think it strange to see them defending, with the same heat and bitterness, what they conceive to be the most essential requisite to happiness, both here and hereafter? If we will but consider religion in that single point of view, which is the only one that has any relation to this question, *as an object which men have very much at heart:* and will admit the operation of the same passions and prejudices as are excited by any *other* object that they have at heart, we shall no longer be at a loss for the source of those mischiefs that have been ascribed to it.

II. As the nature of the human mind furnishes a very obvious reason for religious bigotry, and cruelty

* "*Political Society*, on a moderate calculation, has been the means of murdering several times the number of inhabitants now upon the earth." See that admirable piece of irony, *A Vindication of Natural Society*, by the late Mr. Edmund Burke; in which the argument against Christianity, drawn from the mischiefs occasioned by religious bigotry and persecution, is most ingeniously and completely overthrown.

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in general, so may we, from the peculiar circumstances and situation of the earlier Christians, account for the origin of *their* propensity to it in particular.

Excess of happiness, or excess of misery, is frequently observed to give a savage turn to the temper. From the one, the mind is apt to contract a kind of hardness, and from the other a wantonness, which render it equally insensible to the feelings of humanity. It was from the agonies of a death-bed, amidst the pains of a most loathsome disease, and the still more insupportable torments of a wounded conscience, looking back on a life full of iniquity, that Herod gave orders for all the principal Jews to be massacred the moment he expired*. And it was, on the contrary, from the midst of a luxurious and a voluptuous court, abounding with every thing that could minister to ease, magnificence, and delight, that the scourge of the last century, Louis the XIVth, gave orders for turning into a desert, the country of a prince, whose only crime it was to be his enemy †. So similar are the effects which flow from these two opposite extremes.

Both these extremes the Christian church experienced, about the time we are speaking of, and, what was still more trying, experienced them in a very quick succession. The members of that church, from being persecuted, tormented, afflicted, and treated as the off-scourings of the earth, became on a sudden the lords of it. Some, perhaps, *may* have fortitude enough to support great misery, or, what is perhaps no less difficult, extreme happiness, without any injury to their tempers. But it is very few that can bear a rapid transition from the one to the other, from indigence, distress, and oppression, to ease, security, and power. It was too much for the disciples even of the meek and humble Jesus. One might have thought,

* Josephus. Antiq. l. xvii. c. 6.

† Voltaire, though a Frenchman, and of course an admirer of Louis, yet speaks of this barbarous devastation of the Palatinate in the terms it deserves. The natural and affecting picture he draws of that shocking scene, must strike every heart with horror. *Essai sur l'Histoire Generale, tom.* v. c. 16.

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perhaps, that upon the civil establishment of their religion, the recent sense of their own sufferings would have taught them a lesson of mildness and moderation towards others. But it unhappily taught them the very same lesson that it has generally taught to every other people in the same circumstances, in all ages of the world. For it is a fact too notorious to be denied, that in most contentions for superiority, whether religious or civil, the suffering party, when raised to power by a reverse of fortune, has scarce ever failed to adopt that inhumanity under which they so lately groaned; and it is not so much oppression that is crushed, as the oppressor that is changed. Every one will, upon this occasion, recall to mind the well-known sanguinary struggles for power between the two rival states of Greece, and the still more sanguinary revolutions in the latter periods of the Roman republic; where the only contest seemed to be, which should exceed the other in cruelty; and where the remembrance of former massacres was obliterated, not by acts of mercy and forgiveness, but by massacres still more furious and unrelenting, by the almost entire annihilation of the vanquished faction.

When, therefore, our adversaries say that the Christians made no other use of the new-acquired assistance of the civil arm, than to harass one another, and oppress their enemies, what else do they say, than that Christians were men; that they only did what *men of all religions and denominations* have commonly done under the same circumstances and temptations; and that the spirit of the Gospel was lost in the corruption of human nature*.

* We find that even Julian, the *philosophic* Julian, though not a Christian, yet by some means or other became a most zealous bigot and persecutor. He was of opinion, it seems, that a *frantic patient* (that is a Christian) might sometimes be cured by *salutary violence*. He applied this remedy himself with no small degree of alacrity and vigor, and in some parts of his dominions allowed his provincial ministers to exercise the most brutal acts of cruelty towards the Christians with impunity, nay sometimes with applause. He even added insult to oppression. He condescended to employ against the *detested Galileans* (as he was pleased to call the Christians) the acrimony of his imperial pen, and made them feel, not only the whole weight of his sovereign power, but the utmost severity of his *ironical and*

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It might have been expected, indeed, that the excellence of their religion would have restrained them from the common excesses of their species, and rendered them as much superior to other men in humanity and tenderness, as the benevolence of the Gospel was to that of every other religious institution in the world. And certain it is that Christianity did by degrees soften and mitigate the ferocity of the human mind. But this was not to be done one the sudden, in large bodies of men and extensive empires. It could not, without a miracle, instantaneously change the temper of the times, and bring about in a moment an entire revolution in the prevailing disposition and established character of those ages. The Roman emperors and their armies had for many centuries been accustomed to violence, war, dissension, and tumult. They had been accustomed also to see every thing bend to their power, and obey their commands. When, therefore, they became ligislators in RELIGION, as well as in every thing else, they would carry the same ideas along with them, even into that subject. They would expect a submission as complete and absolute in that point as in every other; and, if the smallest resistance was made to their sovereign will and pleasure, they would be very apt to apply the same means to subdue stubborn consciences, which they had found so successful in subduing provinces and kingdoms. Thus did force come to be considered as the properest and most effectual argument in religious as well as in civil contests. The ecclesiastics would naturally be carried away in the general current, with all the other subjects of the Roman empire, and adopt the predominant sentiments and habits of their countrymen. And it would require a

carcastic wit. The causes of those instances of intolerance, are not surely to be sought for in the religion of Christ. See Mr. Gibbon's Hist. of the Decline, &c. vol. ii. p. 370. to 409. The *philosophers* were the chief instigators of the persecution of the Christians under Dioclesian; and Mr. Hume acknowledges, that the most refined and *philosophic* sects, are constantly the most intolerant. With what justice then can "*philosophy* alone boast that her gentle hand is able to eradicate from the human mind the latent and deadly principles of fanaticism?" Ib. vol. i. ch. 8. n. 24. vol. ii. p. 505. and vol. i. p. 560.

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considerable length of time, and much juster conceptions of the true character and genius of the Gospel than many of its teachers then entertained, to correct those inveterate prejudices, and subdue those turbulent passions, which had taken such firm hold upon their minds.

III. With these obstacles in the way, it was hardly possible for the mild and benevolent principles of Christianity to produce any *immediate* effect. And their operation was most unfortunately still further obstructed by another cause which took place in the succeeding ages. Those northern barbarians, who, not long after the civil establishment of Christianity, invaded and overran the western empire, brought in with them a spirit of cruelty and martial violence, which was propagated with their dominions, and communicated from the conquerors to those they conquered. Their savage manners added fresh fuel to that sternness of disposition which had descended to the Christians of those ages from their Roman ancestors. At the same time, by declaring open war against all learning, sacred or profane, they in a great measure precluded those whom they had vanquished from the only effectual remedy that could be applied to that barbarity which they taught them. They rendered it almost impossible for them to acquire a complete knowledge and a right apprehension of the true temper of the Gospel, whose mild and gracious influence could alone rectify their errors and purify their hearts. No wonder then, that when this influence was in a great measure lost, when the Scriptures were shut up in an unknown tongue, when the cultivation of letters, and especially of all critical and biblical learning, was at an end, when Gothic brutality was ingrafted on Roman fierceness, and every thing tended to inflame and exasperate the most furious passions of the soul; no wonder that the beneficent genius of Christianity could not operate with its full and genuine force on the manners of those times. Yet still, notwithstanding all those disadvantages, when the barbarians themselves became converts to the faith,

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it did in fact produce an effect, which no other cause was powerful enough to produce; it mollified, in many important instances, the ferocious temper of those savage conquerors, who were thus in their turn subdued by the religion of those very enemies whom they had vanquished in the field*. And though, for the reasons above assigned, the spirit of intolerance continued to prevail, and even gradually to gain ground; yet it was not till about the beginning of the thirteenth century, in which darkness and barbarity overspread the face of the whole earth, that this evil arrived at its utmost height. It was not till then that the inhuman wars against the Albigenses first began, that Christendom became for a long time one continued scene of desolation, that persecution was reduced to a regular system, and murder made legal by that dreadful instrument of human fury, the inquisition; in all which, Christianity had just as much share, as ignorance, enthusiasm, bigotry, and superstition, have in the composition of genuine Christianity†. And although to us these wild excesses of mistaken zeal do now justly appear in the most odious colors, yet, as they were only of a piece with the general practice of those ages in *other* instances, they did not *then* excite in the minds of men any peculiar degree of astonishment or horror. At a time when military ideas predominated in every thing, in the form of government, in the temper of the laws, in the tenure, of lands, and even in the administration of justice itself, it could not be matter of much surprize that the church should become military too. And to those who were accustomed to see (as they then frequently did) a civil right or a criminal charge, nay, even an abstract point of law‡, decided by a combat or a fiery ordeal, instead of a legal trial, it would not

* See History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, vol. iii. p. 533. 633.

† Most of the bitter invectives, and eloquent declamations of both foreign and domestic philosophers against the mischievous effects of religion, are not objections to *Christianity* but to *popery*; and though they may embarrass a Romish divine, yet seldom create any difficulty to a Protestant one.

‡ Some very curious instances of this may be seen in Dr. Robertson's History of Charles V. vol. i. note 22. p. 348. 8vo.

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seem at all extraordinary to teach men Christianity by fire and faggot, instead of argument and reason.

IV. There is still another very material consideration to be taken into the account.

It is beyond a doubt, that a large part of those dissensions, wars, and massacres, which have been usually stiled religious, and with the entire guilt of which Christianity has been very unjustly loaded, have been altogether, or at least in a great measure, owing to political causes. Nothing has been more common, in all ages, than to see faction and ambition assuming a mask of religion, and pretending to fight in the cause of God and his church, when they had in reality nothing else in view but to create confusion or establish tyranny. It is well known, for instance, that the crusades themselves, which are generally styled, by way of eminence, the HOLY WARS, took their rise not from zeal for the Gospel or reverence for the Holy Land, but from the ambition, avarice, and rapacity, of two most turbulent Pontiffs*; that the war of the League, and other civil wars in France, which were commonly supposed to have religion for their only subject, were in fact originally kindled, and principally fomented, by the restless intrigues and personal resentments of the princes of the blood, and other great leaders of opposite factions†; and that the dreadful distractions in this country, during the last century, were not (as one of our historians affirms‡) owing *chiefly* to religious controversy, but to political causes. By what he calls, *the infusion of theological hatred*, the sore was not *made*, but only *inflamed*; and although Cromwell, with much solemnity, affected, in every stage of his guilty progress, to be only *seeking the Lord*, yet it soon appeared that he was in truth *seeking*, what he ultimately obtained, the subversion of the constitution, and the acquisition of sovereign power.

From these, and innumerable other instances of a similar nature, which might be produced, it is evident

* Gregory the VIIth, and Urban the IId.

† See *Davila* throughout; but particularly B. i. and vi. in which he investigates with great sagacity the secret springs of those disturbances.

‡ Hume, Hist. of England, 4to. vol. v. p. 255.

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that difference of opinion in matters of faith, has much oftener been the *ostensible* than the *real* cause of the calamities which have been ascribed to it. But were we even to allow that it has been the true and only source of those calamities, yet still the Gospel itself stands perfectly clear of all blame on this account. Whatever mischief persecution may have done in the world (and it has, God knows, done full enough) it was not Christ, but some mistaken followers of Christ, that brought this sword upon earth; and it would be as injurious to ascribe to Revelation the false opinions and wrong practices of its disciples, however pernicious, as to impute to the physician the fatal mistakes of those who administered his medicines. The very best laws are liable to be perverted and misinterpreted. It was the fate of the evangelical law to be so. Its spirit was misunderstood, and its precepts misapplied, by some of its avowed friends, and its authority made use of as a cloak for cruelty and oppression by some of its secret enemies. But the Gospel all the while was guiltless of this blood. It disclaimed and abhorred such unnatural supports, which it was as far from wanting as it was from prescribing. It authorized the use of no other means of conviction, but gentleness and persuasion; and if any of its disciples were, by a misguided zeal, betrayed into violent and sanguinary measures, the blame is all their own, and it is *they* must answer for it, not Jesus or his religion*.

V. That this is a true representation of the case, appears not only from the example and the declarations of our divine lawgiver, and the endless exhortations in the sacred writings to peace, love, mercy, compassion, and brotherly kindness towards all men; but from this consideration also, that in proportion as the Scriptures came to be more studied, and Christianity of course better understood, intolerance lost ground continually, and grew less violent in every successive age. And no sooner did the revival of letters, and the reformation of

* To impute crimes to Christianity is the act of a Novice.——See the K. of Prussia's Works, vol. xi p. 171.

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some parts of the Christian church, disperse that Ægyptian darkness in which all Europe had been so long involved, that juster notions, and milder sentiments of religion, began immediately to take place. That hideous spectre PERSECUTION, which had terrified all the world during the night of universal ignorance, now shrunk at the approach of day: and when, upon the translation of the Bible into several languages then in vulgar use, every Protestant, with delight and astonishment, heard the Scriptures speak to him, *in his own tongue wherein he was born**, he immediately felt the heavenly influence upon his soul; and, as the sacred writings opened more and more upon him, found his heart gradually melt within him into tenderness, compassion, and love towards every human being, of whatever denomination, party, sect, or persuasion.

VI. From that time to the present, the divine principle of charity has been continually acquiring fresh strength. In every reformed, that is, in every enlightened country, the native mildness of Christianity has evidently shown itself in a greater or a less degree; and by subduing, or at least greatly mitigating the spirit of intolerance, has demonstrated to all the world, that the genuine tendency of its doctrines and its precepts, when rightly understood, is not to bring *destruction* but *peace* upon earth. These happy consequences of a better acquaintance with Revelation, seem to be gradually making their way into other kingdoms. Even that church which was the original parent, and is still in some countries the chief support, of persecution, has of late appeared to feel some small relentings of humanity, and to abate a little of its native implacability. One of the firmest supporters of its tyranny, the society of Jesuits, is now no more, and many other of its religious communities are approaching gently to their dissolution†.

* Acts ii. 8.

† In France, Germany, Venice, and many parts of Italy, several religious houses have within the last ten or twenty years been suppressed. Smaller communities have been thrown together. In some, none are allowed to take the vows under a certain age nor to give up to the convent more than a certain part of their property; others are absolutely forbid to admit any more novices,

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In two of the most bigotted and superstitious countries of Europe*, the inquisition has not of late years exhibited any of those public spectacles of cruelty and horror, with which it used formerly to astonish all the world. In some places it has lost or laid aside almost all its terrors; and in other Popish kingdoms the Protestants are said to enjoy a much greater degree of security and ease than they have known for many years†. These circumstances seem to indicate, that the odious spirit of intolerance is almost every where dying away, and that the whole Christian world is gradually approaching to that liberal and merciful way of thinking, which is so conformable to the precepts of their divine Master, and so essential to the mutual comfort and tranquillity of all his disciples. Certain at least it is, that in every country where the reformation has made its way, the more Christianity has been studied, and its true nature and disposition developed, the more benevolent and merciful it has constantly appeared to be. The Church of England, in particular, has been distinguished no less for the moderation and lenity of its conduct, than for the purity of its doctrines. And although, after it had shaken off the galling yoke of Popery, it could not on a sudden divest itself of all its ancient hereditary prjudices; although it was a considerable length of time before it could fancy itself secure against the Protestant separatists, without that body-guard of pains and penalties with which it had been accustomed to see itself, as well as every church in Europe, surrounded; yet even in the plenitude of its authority, and when its ideas and its exercise of ecclesiastical discipline were at the highest, it stands chargeable with fewer acts of extreme and extravagant severity than any other established church, of the same magnitude and power, in the whole Christian world. By degrees, however, as it improved in knowledge, it improved in mildness too.

* Spain and Portugal.

† In Poland, France, Bohemia, and Hungary. In the two last, as well as in all the other Austrian dominions, the Emperor Joseph has taken very decisive steps towards a complete toleration, and an almost entire renunciation of the papal jurisdiction within his territories.

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The last century saw *the beginning*, and the present times have seen *the farther extension*, of a most noble system of religious liberty, which has placed legal toleration on its true basis; a measure no less consonant to sound policy than to the spirit of Christianity, and from which we may reasonably promise ourselves the most pacific and salutary effects. Let us then continue to maintain the character we have so justly acquired, of being the great supporters of religious freedom and the sacred rights of conscience; let us make allowances for the natural prejudices of those who differ from us, and "forbear one another in love." There is, indeed, something very delightful in the idea of the whole Christian world uniting in every article of faith and practice, and agreeing no less in inward sentiment than in outward form. But this, I fear, is a visionary scene of unity and concord, which we have no reason to expect from any promises of Scripture, and still less from any principles of human nature. But there is an unity very consistent with the one, and very forcibly recommended by the other, "the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace*." This is that truly Christian bond, which, linking together every heart, leaves every judgment free, and, from the seeming discord of many different parts, makes up the entire consent and harmony of the whole.

By a conduct formed on these genuine scriptural principles, we shall give the most effectual answer to the great objection which has been here combated, and the fullest confirmation to the several propositions that have been advanced, and I trust established, in this discourse. We shall confute by *example*, as well as by argument, the heavy charges of cruelty which have been so often urged against the religion we profess. We shall show (in perfect conformity to the preceding observations) that these cruelties are in fact no just ground of reproach to the Gospel; that they are imputable only to those who have totally misapprehended or wilfully perverted its doctrines and its precepts; that the constitu-

* Ephesians iv. 3.

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tional temper of the Christian Revelation is not SEVERITY, but MERCY; and that although this was for a while obstructed or suspended by the operation of adventitious causes, and the influence of local and accidental circumstances, yet these having now either wholly ceased, or lost much of their original force, the divine benevolence of our religion has evidently begun, in this and many other countries, to produce its genuine effects. And we have every reason to believe, that, as scriptural knowledge advances, these effects will diffuse themselves, though perhaps by slow degrees, over the whole Christian world; that "the kingdom of God" shall finally appear to be, in a temporal as well as a spiritual sense, what the Scriptures affirm it to be, JOY AND PEACE*; and the effect of righteousness, QUIETNESS AND ASSURANCE FOR EVER†.

* Rom. xiv. 17. † Isai. xxxii. 17.

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SERMON XIII.

LUKE ii. 14.

On earth peace, good-will towards men.

THE sacred hymn, of which the text is a part, is that which the heavenly host were heard to sing at the birth of Christ; and the meaning of the words is generally allowed to be, That this great event would be productive of peace to all the inhabitants of the earth, and was a most striking proof of God's good-will to mankind.

One cannot help observing with what solemnity our blessed Redeemer was introduced into the world. He had not indeed any of this world's pomp to follow him. The grandeur that attended him was, like his kingdom, of a spiritual nature; and it was a grandeur which shamed the pride of earthly magnificence. He was welcomed into life by the united congratulations of those celestial spirits, whose abodes he had just quitted, to take upon him the form of a man. It is the only event recorded in history, that was ever dignified with such rejoicings, except that of the creation. When the "corner-stone" of the earth was laid, the sacred writers tell us "that the morning stars "sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for "joy*." This *corner-stone* † of the *new creation* was laid with the same solemnity. It should seem that these were the only two occasions which deserved so glorious a distinction; and that the redemption of

* Job xxxviii. 6, 7. † Eph. ii. 20.

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mankind appeared to the heavenly host to be a work no less glorious to God, and beneficial to man, than their creation. It is indeed in this light that the Scriptures do all along consider it. They represent it as a *new creation**, as an entrance upon *a new life*†, as the production of a *new man*‡, and frequently speak of it in terms that have a manifest allusion to the first formation of all things. Christ himself is called THE LIGHT of this new world‖; and, as the *power and wisdom* of God are "clearly seen in the things that "are made§, in the *natural* world, so in reference to the *spiritual* world, our Lord is in a still more emphatical manner styled THE POWER OF GOD, AND THE WISDOM OF GOD ¶. And indeed, if to form the goodly fabric of this globe out of a confused heap of jarring elements, to raise up man from the dust of the ground, and breathe into him a living soul, were a most lively display of God's infinite wisdom and power, it was surely no less striking a proof of those divine attributes, to find out a way of reconciling his justice and his mercy, of bringing peace and salvation out of guilt and misery, and "quickening us again when dead in "trespasses and sins**." And as our redemption was no less glorious to God than our creation, so neither was it less beneficial to man. We should have had but little reason to rejoice in our creation, had not God once more "created us to good works††." Christianity threw open to us another and a better world, "a new heaven and a new earth‡‡;" it restored to us the only things that could make existence worth possessing, the favor of God, the means of happiness, and the hopes of immortality.

It is worthy also of observation, that this mode of celebrating the birth of our Redeemer was most remarkably adapted to the character of the Messiah, and the nature of the commission with which he was charged. The ancient historians frequently affected to usher in the birth of warriors and conquerors with

* 2 Cor. v. 17. Gal. vi. 15. † Rom. vi. 4. ‡ Eph. iv. 24. Col. iii. 10. ‖ John viii. 12. § Rom. i. 20. ¶ 1 Cor. i. 24. ** Eph. ii. 1. †† Ephes. ii. 10. ‡‡ 2 Pet. iii. 13.

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portents and prodigies of a dreadful nature; commendable in this, at least, that their fictions were well-suited to their personages, the enemies and destroyers of mankind. The Friend and Saviour of mankind was introduced into the world with declarations of universal peace and good-will. And in this the angels only speak the constant language of Scripture in describing the Messiah. They speak of him in a manner in which he loves to speak of himself, in which the prophets spoke of him before, and the apostles after him. He is called by Isaiah "THE PRINCE OF PEACE." "Of "the increase of his government and peace there is "said to be no end*." A little after, his reign is described by the most pacific emblems that imagination could furnish, by "the wolf dwelling with the "lamb, and the leopard lying down with the kid†." His work of righteousness is peace ‡, and he makes with mankind the covenant of peace §. He himself tells his disciples, that "in him they were to have "peace ‖;" and it is the legacy he bequeaths them, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you**. The sacred writers continue the same language in the New Testament. "The kingdom of "God is joy and peace ††." His Gospel is called "the Gospel of peace ‡‡;" and it is their constant salutation to the persons and churches to which they write. So remarkable a frequency and agreement in the use and application of this word, naturally raise our curiosity to enquire into the meaning of it, and make it worth our while to enquire in what sense or senses Christ may be said *to have brought peace upon earth:* which will lead us to the proof of the latter part of the text, that his birth was a most remarkable instance *of God's good-will to mankind.*

I. The first and most important sense in which our Lord may be said to have brought us *peace*, was, by taking upon him the sins of the world, and thereby making *our peace with God*, and in consequence of

* Isaiah ix. 6. 7. † Ib. xi. 6. ‡ Ib. xxxii. 17. § Ib. liv. 10. ‖ John xvi. 33. ** John xiv. 27. †† Rom. xiv. 17. ‡‡ 1b. x. 15.

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this, giving us that *that peace of mind* which the world could not give. "He is our peace," says the apostle, "that he might reconcile us to God*." "The chas-"tisement of our peace was upon him†." "Being "justified by faith, we have peace with God through "our Lord Jesus Christ‡." Expressions of this and the like import are so frequent in Scripture, that it is impossible for the most ingenious criticism to elude their force. They evidently prove, that the PEACE which our Saviour "brought on earth," was in its primary acceptation of a *spiritual* nature; that when we were at enmity with God, our peace was made with him by the death of his Son; that he gave himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God||; and that this is the chief point of view in which his divine mission is considered in Scripture. And no wonder that it should be so; for it was this of which mankind stood in the greatest need, and which natural religion was least able to afford. Whatever pretensions reason might make to the knowledge of a future state, or a complete rule of moral conduct, yet, to find out what atonement God would be pleased to accept for the sins of the whole world, was a discovery which exceeded the utmost stretch of her abilities. That *some* expiation was necessary, the Heathens plainly saw. They saw, that if there was a God, he must be pleased with virtue, and offended with vice. They perceived, that they were *not* virtuous, and therefore could not be in favor with God. They seem even to have wanted the first and fundamental requisite to tranquillity, an assurance that pardon was on *any* terms to be obtained. Their Jupiter was armed with *thunder and lightning*; he had the ministers of his vengeance always at hand: but they had no emblems by which they were accustomed to express his *mercy*. There was indeed a *possibility*, perhaps a probability, that the Deity *might* pardon their offences; but there was also a possibility that he might *not*; and the very *possibility* of being exposed to the resentment of a Being, without mercy

* Eph. ii. 14, 16. † Isai. liii. 5. ‡ Rom. v. 1. || Heb. ix. 26; x. 12.

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and without control, was enough to sink them into despair. But whatever hopes they might have of appeasing the Deity by proper means, they could have but little (as I before observed) of finding out those means. The sacrifice of animals was the atonement on which they principally depended (a plain proof by the way, that the necessity of *some* animal sacrifice was an idea deeply rooted in the hearts of men); but they were not always satisfied even with this. Having perfect confidence in nothing, they tried every thing. They ran from one expedient to another, and, like men ready to perish, catched at every thing that seemed to afford the least shadow of relief. Hence that incredible number of deities, temples, altars, festivals, games, sacrifices, supplications, processions, and, in short, that infinite variety of ceremonies and superstitions, which served plainly to *show* their uneasiness, but not at all to *remove* it.

Here, then, the Gospel gave us PEACE, where nothing human could. From this we know that God is merciful, long-suffering, and of great goodness. We know that he is reconciled to us by the death of his Son; we are acquainted also with the means of preserving that favor which Christ procured for us; and there is no longer added to the misery of guilt, the torment of not knowing how to expiate it. We are assured, "that "Jesus is the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin "of the world: that he came to seek and to save that "which was lost: and that whosoever believeth in him "shall not perish, but have everlasting life*. In this respect, therefore, that is, in the most important of all human concerns, the meanest man amongst us has more true content, and peace, and satisfaction of mind†, than all the learning and wisdom of all the philosophers upon earth, ancient or modern, could ever bestow. But,

II. It is not only in a spiritual sense that our Redeemer *brought peace upon earth;* it is true of him in

* John i. 20. Matth. xviii. 11. John iii. 15.

† Te duce, si qua manent sceleris vestigai nostri,
Irrita *perpetua solvent formidine* terras. VIRG. Ecl. iv. 13.

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a temporal meaning also. That benevolence of disposition, and gentleness of behavior, which he so constantly and so warmly recommended, both by his doctrine and his example, were entirely calculated to promote the peace and harmony of mankind, and to knit them together in one common bond of love and affection. If ever PEACE was made visible in outward form, it was in the person of our blessed Lord. His whole life and conversation were one uniform representation of it, insomuch that it might, even in this sense, be affirmed of him, that "of his PEACE there was no end*." It would be no difficult nor unpleasing task to trace the influence of this principle from his earliest to his latest breath; and to draw together a very uncommon and surprizing assemblage of circumstances, all concurring to establish the uniformity of its operation through the whole tenor of his life; but it may suffice for the present to touch upon a few of the most obvious. It has always been remarked, that he came into the world in a time of profound and almost universal peace; and his birth was (as we have seen) first announced, by declarations of peace and good-will, to shepherds, men, generally speaking, of a most quiet and inoffensive disposition and behavior. The years of his childhood were passed in a meek and dutiful subjection to his earthly parents; and after he came into public life, he showed the same peaceable submission to all his other lawful superiors. The persons whom he chose to be the companions and the witnesses of his ministry, were of the lowest station, and the humblest tempers. The first miracle he worked, was with a design to promote good-humor and good-will among men; and all of them tended to improve the peaceful enjoyment of life in some material instance. Yet, benevolent as the design of these and all his other actions was, he endeavored to do them all in such a manner, at such times, and in such places, as to give no offence to any one; to excite no envy, jealousy, or unjust suspicions. He had at the same time to struggle with the prejudices, the mistakes,

* Isaiah ix. 7.

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and misconstructions of his friends, and the inveterate rancor of his enemies; but yet he never suffered either the one or the other to disturb the composure of his mind, or the peaceableness of his deportment. He bore all the unmerited insults and injuries of his adversaries with more patience than his followers could see them, and was almost the only person that was not provoked at the treatment he met with. The same love of peace attended him to the last. The sword that was drawn in his defence he ordered to be sheathed*, and healed the wound it had inflicted†. Although, "if he had "prayed to his father, he would have sent him twelve "legions of angels‡, yet he suffered himself to be "led like a lamb to the slaughter; and as a sheep be- "fore her shearers is dumb, so opened he not his "mouth§.

As he lived, so he also taught, for he "spoke "PEACE to his people**." The main purport of his discourses was, to banish from the minds of men all those malignant and turbulent passions which fill the world with disorder and misery, and to introduce in their room, every thing that tends to turn away wrath, to soften resentment, and to cherish peace; a meek and inoffensive deportment, a patient resignation under injuries and affronts, a compassionate tenderness and fellow-feeling for the miseries of others, and a benevolence as extensive as the whole creation of God. If ever he entered into a house, he saluted it with peace††. If the penitent and contrite sinner fell down and begged mercy at his feet, he bid him go in peace and sin no more‡‡. He was continually exhorting his disciples to "be at peace one with another, to love their very "enemies, to bless those that cursed them, to do good "to those that hated them, and to pray for those that "despitefully used and persecuted them§§."

From such a doctrine, supported by such an example, one might naturally hope for the most pacific effects. And in fact those effects have followed. For,

* John xviii. 11. † Luke xxii. 51. ‡ Matth. xxvi. 53. § Isai. liii. 7.
** Zech. ix. 10. †† Luke x. 5. ‡‡ Ib. vii. 50; viii. 48. John viii. 11.
§§ Mark ix. 50. Matt. iv. 44.

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although Christianity has not always been so well understood, or so honestly practised, as it might have been; although its spirit has been often mistaken, and its precepts misapplied *, yet, under all these disadvantages, it has gradually produced a visible and a blessed change in those points which most materially concern the peace and quiet of the world. Its beneficent spirit has spread itself through all the different relations and modifications of life, and communicated its kindly influence to almost every public and private concern of mankind. It has insensibly worked itself into the inmost frame and constitution of civil states. It has given a tinge to the complexion of their governments, to the temper and administration of their laws. It has restrained the spirit of the prince, and the madness of the people. It has softened the rigor of despotism, and tamed the insolence of conquests. It has, in some degree, taken away the edge of the sword, and thrown even over the horrors of war a veil of mercy. It has descended into families, has diminished the pressure of private tyranny, improved every domestic endearment, given tenderness to the parent, humanity to the master, respect to superiors, to inferiors ease; and left, in short, the most evident traces of its PEACEFUL GENIUS, in all the various subordinations, dependencies, and connexions of social life. These assertions would very easily admit, and may perhaps hereafter receive a particular proof. But, for the present, I must content myself with observing in general, that mankind are, upon the whole, even in a temporal view, under infinite obligations to the mild and pacific temper of the Gospel; have reaped from it more substantial worldly benefits than from any other institution upon earth; and found it, by happy experience, to be a religion entirely worthy the gracious Father of the universe, and the Saviour of mankind. As one proof of this, (among many others) consider only the shocking carnage made in the human species, by the exposure of infants, the gladiatorial shows, and

* See the preceding discourse.

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the exceedingly cruel usage of slaves, allowed and practised by the ancient Pagans. These were not the accidental and temporary excesses of a sudden fury, but were *legal*, and *established*, and *constant* methods of murdering and tormenting mankind, encouraged by the wisest legislators, and affording amusement to the tenderest and most compassionate minds *. Had Christianity done nothing more than brought into disuse (as it confessedly has done) the two former of these inhuman customs entirely, and the latter to a very great degree, it had justly merited the title of the BENEVOLENT RELIGION. But this is far from being all. Throughout the more enlightened parts of Christendom, there prevails a gentleness of manners widely different from the ferocity of the most civilized nations of antiquity; and that liberality with which every species of distress is relieved, both by private donations and public benefactions, even in some of the most bigotted countries of Europe, is a virtue as peculiar to the Christian name as it is eminently conducive to social happiness. As for ourselves, in the nature of our civil constitution, in the extent of our freedom, in the security of our persons and properties, in the temper of our laws, in the administration of justice, in domestic

* Besides the many other well-known severities exercised towards the slaves of the ancients, there was a law at Sparta, called the Cryptia, which ordered them to be murdered in cold blood, whenever they increased so fast as to give umbrage to the state. *Plutarch, in Lycurg.* The same author (*De Amore Prolis*) speaks of the exposure of infants as a very common practice. *Seneca* does the same. *De Ira*, l. i. c. 15. It still obtains among the savages in America; and it is said, that upwards of 3000 children are annually exposed in the streets of Pekin. Lipsius affirms (*Saturn*, l. i. c. 12.) that the gladiatorial shows sometimes cost Europe twenty or thirty thousand lives in a month; and not only the men, but even the women of all ranks, were passionately fond of these shows. The execrable barbarities here mentioned, continued as they were without intermission through a long course of years, must have destroyed many more lives than all the temporary ravages of religious persecution put together. I cannot conclude this note, without observing how strongly these shocking facts confirm the description given of the ancient heathens by St. Paul, who represents them as *full of murder, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful.* Rom. i. 29, 31. And indeed the whole picture he there draws of Pagan morality and religion will be found, on examination, to be in every minutest feature of it *exactly and accurately true.* Let the reader peruse that chapter with attention, and let him thank God, from the bottom of his soul, that he is a CHRISTIAN.

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peace and comfort, in offices of mutual kindness and charity, we have a visible and undeniable superiority over the ancients. To what then can this happy change in our circumstances be owing? To philosophy (replies the Deist *) to mild and gentle philosophy, to the humane suggestions of reason, and the improvement of the liberal arts. Were then reason, philosophy, and good learning, utterly unknown in Greece and Rome? Were not these the very fountains of every thing that was sublime and excellent in human wisdom and polite literature, from whence they were distributed in the purest streams over the rest of the world, and descended to all succeeding ages? Were they not carried, in those great schools, to a degree of elegance and perfection, at which it is at least doubtful whether the moderns have yet arrived, or ever will? And yet in these very places, at a time when all the arts and sciences were in their full strength and maturity, it was then that those various inhumanities, which are by Christians held in the utmost abhorrence, were publicly authorized, and an ambitious, contentious, sanguinary disposition universally prevailed. It was then that almost every civil government was a kind of military establishment, was founded in violence and maintained by it; that wars were begun wantonly, conducted fiercely, and terminated inhumanly; that a passion for martial achievements, a lust of empire, an insatiable thirst of glory and conquest, filled the world with bloodshed and confusion. It was then that, in the very best institutions, the greatest part of the subjects enjoyed no liberty at all; and what the rest enjoyed, was purchased frequently at the expense of their repose, their humanity, and a great part of those social comforts which render liberty truly valuable. It was then that the courts of judicature (at Rome more especially) were inconceivably corrupt† ; that the power both of the father and of the husband

* Voltaire de la Tolerance, ch. iv. p. 30. 34. 44.

† Opinio omnium sermone percrebuit in his judiciis quæ nunc sunt *pecuniosum hominem* quam vis sit nocens, *neminem posse damnari. Cic. in Verrem.* Orat. 1.

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was carried beyond all bounds of lenity and utility; that divorces were allowed for the most trivial causes; that the education of children was unreasonably severe and rigorous; that infants were sacrificed to views of policy; that men were trained up to murder each other, for the entertainment of the spectators; and that the happiest states were continually rent in pieces by the most violent dissensons, peoscriptions, and assassinations, which each party in its turn retorted on its adversaries, and always with redoubled fury and inhumanity.

If then the utmost perfection of philosophy and the fine arts was not able to tame the fierceness of ancient manners, nay, if they actually grew worse, in this and many other respects, in proportion to their advancement in learning and politeness, to what else but Christianity can it be owing, that scarce any considerable traces of this universal barbarity now remain among us; that in domestic society, the ease and happiness of each individual, even the very lowest, is properly attended to; that weakness of sex, tenderness of age, and humility of condition, instead of provoking insult, generally attract pity and protection; that civil liberty is in our own country more firmly rooted, more equally diffused, more securely enjoyed; that justice is most uprightly and impartially administered; that the meanest of the people are as much under the protection of the laws as the most rich and powerful; that the rage of universal empire is considerably abated, and the frequency, duration, and cruelty of wars greatly diminished; that civil commotions more rarely happen, are attended commonly with fewer circumstances of inhumanity and horror, and have oftener proved favorable than fatal to liberty; that the very worst dissesions in this country have been "less distinguished by atrocious deeds, either of treachery or cruelty, than were ever any intestine discords of so long continuance*;" and that the two happiest changes we ever experienced, the *restoration*, and the *revolution*

* Hume's Hist. 4to. vol. v. p. 337.

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were effected with very little interruption of public tranquillity, and were nothing more than *easy transitions*, not (as they would have been under Pagan or Mahometan governments) *horrible convulsions* ?* Compare all these amazing improvements in social happiness, since the introduction of Christianity, with the precepts and doctrines of that religion; consider their natural tendency to produce what actually has been produced, and then say whether you can hesitate one moment in ascribing these effects to the Gospel, as their sole or at least principal cause? What puts this matter almost beyond a doubt, is, that in those countries where the Christian revelation is yet unknown, the civil blessings enjoyed by Christianity are equally unknown. The miseries of their ancestors have descended to them with their superstitions, and bear a daily living testimony to the benevolence of our religion †. And it is no less remarkable, that the degree of perfection in which these advantages are enjoyed by any nation, is in general pretty nearly proportioned to the degree of purity in which the doctrines of the Gospel are there professed

* Some perhaps may be inclined to doubt the truth of one of the positions advanced above, viz. *that the frequency, duration, and cruelty of wars are less now than in ancient times.* But when we consider the immense armies successively raised and lost by the Asiatic monarchs; the endless contentions for sovereignty between the rival states of Greece; the prodigious numbers slain by Alexander the great; the sanguinary contests among his successors for upwards of 200 years; the continual scenes of bloodshed which Sicily exhibited for many centuries under its various tyrants; the incessant wars of the Romans with the Italian states, the Carthaginians, the Macedonians, Greeks, and various Eastern nations, the Spaniards, Gauls, Britains, and Germans, besides the shocking carnage of their own civil wars, so as to have been only three times in a state of peace, for a short interval, during almost seven centuries; when we reflect further, that it was no uncommon thing, in those ages, to see armies of 300,000 men in the field, of which sometimes the whole, frequently the greater part, and always a large part, fell in battle; and when to all this we add the incredible devastations made by the several barbarous hordes, that at different times burst forth in torrents from the North, and deluged Europe, Asia, and Africa with blood; we shall, perhaps, be inclined to think that Christianity has, upon the whole, already lessened the horrors and desolations of war in some degree, and that, as it comes to be better understood, and more generally embraced and practised, its pacific influence will be growing every day more visible and effectual.

† Let the reader only compare the present state of the Eastern and Western Indies, of Africa and China, of the Turkish and the Persian empires, and of all the late discovered islands, both in the northern and the southern hemisphere, with that of the Christian part of Europe, and he will have little reason to doubt the truth of what is here asserted.

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and taught. Thus, for example (to produce only one instance out of a multitude) in those kingdoms, where there is no Christianity, there is no liberty. Where the superstitions and corruptions of Popery, have almost totally destroyed the simplicity of the Christian revelation, there too is liberty much obscured and depressed. Where some of those corruptions are thrown off, there some brighter gleams of liberty appear. Where the national religion approaches nearest to the native purity of the Gospel, there too civil liberty shines forth in its full lustre, and is carried to a degree of perfection, beyond which human weakness will not, perhaps, suffer it to be advanced.

III. Having dwelt so long on the first part of this discourse, *the beneficial influence of the Gospel on the peace and happiness of mankind*, there is the less time, and indeed the less necessity, to enlarge on the other, that is, *on the evidence which arises from hence of the divine goodness and mercy towards us*. For, since it has been shewn that Christ did in almost every sense of the word, *bring peace upon earth** ; that he has made our peace with God, by taking upon him the sins of the whole world; that he has, in consequence of this, restored to us our peace of mind; that he has introduced peace and gentleness into the sentiments and the manners of men towards each other; and that, notwithstanding all the difficulties and disadvantages under which the Gospel has labored, the many violent passions it has had to struggle with, and the variety of obstacles which have impeded its operations, and counteracted its natural effects, it has nevertheless gradually and silently, yet effectually, advanced the peace and comfort of society; what need can there be of any further proof that the mission of Christ was a most striking instance of God's good-will to mankind?

Instead therefore of going about to prove what we all feel to be true, let me rather endeavor to inspire you with what I fear is not always felt as it ought to be, a proper warmth of gratitude and love for such unspeak-

* See Vitringa on Isaiah ii. 4.

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able goodness. If you ask what return God expects for sending his Son into the world, let the Apostle answer you; "If God so loved us, we ought also to love "one another*." An extensive, an active benevolence, is the tribute he demands from you; and when he makes *you* happy, the condition is no harder than this, that *you* should make *others* so. Let then your thankfulness be expressed in that best and most forcible of all languages, better, as St. Paul says, than the tongue of men and angels, CHARITY. Let it prompt you to every act of kindness and humanity towards your neighbor. In this there can be no dissimulation or disguise. Sacrifices may be offered by impure hands, and praises by dissembling or unmeaning lips. But he who relieves the indigent, instructs the ignorant, comforts the afflicted, protects the oppressed, conceals the faults he sees, and forgives the injuries he feels, affords a most convincing proof of his sincerity, an incontestible evidence of his gratitude to his heavenly benefactor. And be not afraid, I beseech you, of doing too much, of *over-paying* God's favors. After you have ranged through the whole field of duties, which charity lays open to you, the blessings you bestow will fall infinitely short of those you have received. Put then your abilities upon the stretch, to do all the good you can unto all men. But in a more especial manner, since it was one of the chief ends of Christ's mission *to bring peace upon earth*, let it be your great ambition to co-operate with him, as far as you are able, in this great design; let it be your constant study and delight to tread in the steps of your blessed Master, and to contribute every thing in your power towards completing that great and god-like work of *giving peace to man*. "Let all bit-"terness, and wrath, and clamor, and evil-speaking, be "put away from among you, with all malice; and be "ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one "another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven "you†."

* John iv. 11. † Ephesians iv. 31, 32.

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SERMON XIV.

2 Tim. iii. 4.

Lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.

TO what period of time, and to what particular persons, the sacred writer here alluded, it is neither easy nor material to determine. But there *is* a question which it is very material, and I doubt but too easy, for most of us to answer; whether the description in the text may not be justly applied to ourselves? In whatever sense we take the word PLEASURE, whether as denoting those which are in themselves criminal, or those which only become so by excess and abuse; it is surely doing us no injury to say, that we "love them more than God." At present I shall confine myself to that sort of pleasures, which are usually styled innocent; and in a certain degree, and under proper restrictions, undoubtedly are so; I mean the gaieties and amusements of life. If we are not lovers of *these* pleasures more than lovers of God, if our piety is greater than our dissipation, it must be great indeed. If we serve our Maker with half that zeal, half that alacrity and perseverance, with which we pursue our amusements, we should be the most pious nation this day upon earth. But how far this is from being the case, at least with respect to a large proportion of almost every rank of men amongst us, is but too apparent. It is not the LIVING GOD, it is PLEASURE that they worship. To this they are idolaters; to this they sacrifice their time, their talents, their fortunes, their health, and too often their in-

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nocence and peace of mind. In their haste to enjoy this life, they forget that there is another; they live (as the Apostle expresses it) "without God in the world*," and their endless engagements not only exclude all love, but all thought, of him. However carefully right principles of religion may have been originally planted in their breasts, they have no room to grow up. They are choked with the pleasures of this world, and bring no fruit to perfection. Invention seems to have been tortured to find out new ways of consuming time, and of being uselessly employed. And there has appeared so wonderful an ingenuity in this respect, that it seems almost impossible for the wit of man to invent, or the life of man to admit, any further additions to this kind of luxury. There are thousands, even of those who would take it very ill to be called vicious, who yet from the time of their rising in the morning to the time of their going to rest at night, never once bestow a single thought upon eternity; nor while they riot in the blessings of Providence, vouchsafe to cast one devout look up to the gracious Author of them, in whom "they live, and move, and have their being†."

Many, I know, would persuade themselves and others, that there can be no harm where there is no actual vice; and that, provided they step not over the bounds of virtue, they cannot be guilty of an excess in pleasure.

But is it true, in the first place, that the man of gaiety never *does* step over the bounds of virtue? Are all those things which go under the name of amusements as perfectly innocent as they are generally represented to be? Is there not *one* diversion at least (as it is called) and one so predominant in the higher ranks of life, that it has swallowed up almost every other, which is big with the most fatal mischief? A diversion, which, far different from the common run of amusements, has no foundation in our natural appetites; no charms to captivate the fancy, or the understanding; nothing to make glad the heart of man, to give him a cheerful

* Eph. ii. 12. † Acts xvii. 28.

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countenance, and refresh him after the cares and fatigues of duty; but runs counter to reason, sense, and nature; defeats all the purposes of amusement; sinks the spirits instead of raising them; sours the temper instead of improving it: and, when it is carried to its utmost lengths, takes such entire and absolute possession of the soul, as to shut out every other concern both for God and man; extinguishes every generous sentiment; excites the most malignant passions; provokes to the most profane expressions; brings distress, sometimes ruin, upon its wretched votaries, their families, friends, and dependants; tempts them to use unfair, or mean, or oppressive methods of retrieving their affairs; and sometimes to conclude the dismal scene by the last fatal act of desperation. I do not say that gaming *always* produces these effects; or that it is to all persons, in all circumstances, and in all its various degrees, equally pernicious and unlawful. But it has always *a natural tendency* to these effects, it always exposes ourselves and others to great danger, and can never be ranked among our innocent amusements. Yet as such it is every day more and more pursued; nay has even appropriated to itself the name of *play*; for what reason I know not, unless to *play* with our lives and fortunes, with happiness temporal and eternal, be the most delectable of all human enjoyments.

But putting this strange unaccountable passion out of the question; do not even our most allowable diversions sometimes end in sin, though they may not begin with it? Does not an immoderate fondness for these trivial things, insensibly weaken and corrupt our hearts, and lead us by imperceptible steps to a temper of mind, and a course of action, essentially wrong? The fact is, a state of *neutrality* in religion, an insipid mediocrity between vice and virtue, though it is what many would be glad to take up with, is an imaginary state; at least, is very seldom, if ever, to be found in a life of gaiety and dissipation. The man who is constantly engaged in the amusements, can scarce ever escape the pollutions, of the world. In his eager pur-

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suits of pleasure, he will be sometimes apt to overshoot the mark, and to go further than he ought, perhaps than he intended. Even they who are most in earnest about their future welfare; who have taken care to fortify their minds with the firmest principles of religion; who constantly endeavor to keep alive their hopes and fears of futurity; to guard with the utmost vigilance every avenue of the mind, and secure all "the issues of life*;" even these, I say, are sometimes unable with all their caution and circumspection, to prevent surprize; with all their strength and resolution, to withstand the violence of headstrong passions and desires; which often burst through all restraints, and beat down all the barriers that reason and religion had been a long time raising up against them. What then must be the case when all the impressions of religion are, by the continual attrition of diversions, worn out and effaced; when the mind is stript of all prudential caution; no guard left upon the imagination; no check upon the passions; the natural spring and vigor of the soul impaired, and no supernatural aid to strengthen and support it? What else can be expected, but that we should fall an easy prey to the weakest invader, and yield ourselves up to the slightest temptation? "When the unclean spirit cometh, he finds "every thing within prepared for his reception, empty, "swept, and garnished; and he taketh with him seven "other spirits more wicked than himself; and they "enter in, and dwell there, and the last state of that "man is worse than the first†;" he begins in gaiety, and ends in vice.

Let us, however, take this question up on the most favorable grounds: let us allow it possible for you to run round for ever in the circle of gaiety, without ever once striking into the paths of vice. Is this, do you think, sufficient for salvation? If your amusements as effectually choke the good seed as the rankest weeds of vice, can you with any propriety call them innocent? Do you imagine that God, who is a jealous God‡,"

* Proverbs iv. 23. † Matth. xii. 44, 45. ‡ Exod. xx. 5.

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will bear to be supplanted in your affections by every trifle; or that he will be content with your not taking up arms against him, though you do him not one single piece of acceptable service? The utmost you can plead is a kind of negative merit, the merit of doing neither good nor harm; and what reception that is likely to meet with, you may judge from the answer given to the unprofitable servant, who produced his talent wrapt up in a napkin, undiminished indeed, but unimproved: "O thou wicked servant, wherefore "gavest thou not my money into the bank, that at my "coming I might have required mine own with usu-"ry*?" It is not enough merely to abstain from gross crimes. It is not enough to enjoy yourselves in an indolent harmless tranquillity; to divide matters so nicely as to avoid equally the inconveniences of vice, and the fatigues of virtue; to praise religion in words, to love it perhaps in speculation, but to leave the trouble of practising it to others. This languor and inactivity is a kind of lethargy in the soul, which renders it utterly insensible to the life and spirit of religion. Indifference in any good cause is blameable. In religion, in the Christian religion, it is insupportable. It does violence to the first and fundamental principle of that religion: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all "thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, and "with all thy strength†." Go now and let your whole heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, be engaged in pursuing your amusements, and promoting your pleasures, and then lay claim to the rewards of Christianity.

Happy will it be for you, if you can escape its punishments. The Gospel, I am sure, gives you no grounds to suppose that you shall. Though you bear no "evil fruit," yet if you bear no "good," you are involved in the sentence of the fig-tree, "Cut it down, "why cumbereth it the ground‡." To do nothing is, in many cases, to do a positive wrong, and as such requires

* Luke xix. 23. † Mark xii. 30. ‡ Luke xiii. 7.

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a positive punishment. To stand neuter in dangerous commotions of the state, the great Athenian lawgiver declared to be a crime *against* the state; and in like manner the great Christian lawgiver declares; "he "that is not with me, is against me, and he that gath-"ereth not with me, scattereth abroad*."

Christianity is throughout an *active* religion; it consists not only in "abstaining from all appearance of "evil†;" but "in being ready to every good work‡;" and if we stop short at the first, we leave the better half of our business undone. Christ himself "went "about" continually "doing good‖;" and he has prescribed a variety of positive and practical duties to his disciples, as the condition of their salvation; and pressed the performance of these duties upon them, with an earnestness and a force of expression, that may well alarm the thoughtless and the gay, and make them reflect on the extreme danger of their situation. With regard to God, we are commanded "to believe "in him, to fear him, to love him, to worship him, "to give him thanks always, to pray without ceasing, "and watch thereunto with all perseverance." With regard to our neighbor, we are "to do good unto all "men, to be rich in good works, to be kind and ten-"der-hearted, to feed the hungry, to cloath the na-"ked, to remember them that are in bonds, to minis-"ter to the sick, to visit the fatherless and widows in "their affliction." With regard to ourselves, we are enjoined "to be temperate in all things, to keep under "our bodies, and bring them into subjection, to set "our affections on things above, to watch and pray "lest we enter into temptation, to work out our salva-"tion with fear and trembling, to use all diligence to "make our calling and election sure." Such and so various are the duties pressed upon us in every page of the Scriptures. And is this now a religion to be trifled with? Is it not enough to employ every moment we can spare from the indispensible duties of our station, and the necessary refreshments of nature; and how

* Matt. xii. 30. † 1 Thess. v. 22. ‡ Tit. iii. 1. ‖ Acts x. 38.

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then can it be consistent with that incessant hurry and dissipation, which, intent only on providing a succession of worthless amusements and ignoble gratifications, overlooks every obligation of a man and a Christian; and supposes that the whole business of life is not to employ time usefully, but to consume it insignificantly? Can these men seriously imagine that they are all this time "working out their salvation," that they are "pressing forward towards the mark of the prize of "their high calling*," that they are every day drawing nearer and nearer to immortal happiness, and that they shall share the crown of glory with them who "have borne the burden and heat of the day?†" Is eternal life so very small an object, so extremely cheap a purchase, as to require not the least pains to obtain it? Or is the situation of the rich man represented in Scripture to be so perfectly safe and secure, that, while the rest of mankind are enduring afflictions, struggling with difficulties, subduing their passions, and "work-"ing out their salvation with fear and trembling;" he, and he only, may neglect all these precautions, may give up his whole time and thoughts to dress, and magnificence, and diversion, and good cheer; may center his whole care in his own dear person, and make it his sole study to gratify every wish of his heart; may leave his salvation to take care of itself, and, as if he had obtained a promise of Heaven in reversion, think of nothing but present felicity; and say within himself, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many "years, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry‡!" Be not deceived: this is not virtue; this is not religion; this is not Christianity. It is, on the contrary, that very temper of mind, that indolent, soft, luxurious, dream of the soul, for which the rich man in the Gospel was condemned "to lift up his eyes in tor-"ments‖;" and let those who dread his punishment be warned by his example.

It is then a fatal mistake to suppose, that a life of continual gaiety and dissipation, because it is not mark-

* Phil. iii. 14. † Matt. xx. 12. ‡ Luke xii. 19. ‖ Luke xvii. 23.

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ed with any notorious crimes, because it does not shock our consciences with palpable guilt, is therefore perfectly innocent. You have by this time seen, I hope, that it is far from being so. You have seen that it naturally leads to, and frequently terminates in, actual vice; that at the least it so totally unmans and enfeebles the soul, as to render it unfit for the reception of religious truths, incapable of exerting its nobler powers, unable to struggle through the common difficulties, or support the common afflictions, of life; and leaves neither time, nor inclination, nor ability, to perform the most important duties of a man, a social being, and a Christian.

The truth is; although diversions may serve very well to quicken a palled appetite, they are much too poignant and high-seasoned to be the constant food and nourishment of the soul. They not only destroy our relish for the more plain and simple fare of sobriety and virtue, but lay a foundation for the worst diseases; and though they do not so instantly kill as the deadly poison of vice, yet with a gradual and fatal certainty, they undermine the vital parts, and sap the constitution.

Beware then of an error, which is the more dangerous, because it is not always perceived, or at least acknowledged, to *be* an error. And such of you, more especially, as are just setting out in life, full of those high spirits and gay imaginations which youth, and rank, and affluence naturally inspire; beware of giving way to that feverish thirst of pleasure, to that frivolous turn of mind and levity of conduct, which will render all your great advantages useless, and totally defeat every grand purpose of your creation. Do not imagine that you were born to please yourselves only. Do not entertain that false, that destructive notion, that your wealth and time are all your own; that you may dispose of them exactly as you think fit; may lavish the whole of them on your own pleasures and amusements, without being accountable to any one for the application of them. There *is* One, most assuredly, who may, and who has declared that he will,

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call you to an account, for the use of that leisure, and those riches, which he bestowed upon you for far other purposes than that mean ignoble one of mere selfish gratification. There are duties of the last importance owing to your families, your friends, your country, your fellow-creatures, your Creator, your Redeemer, which you are bound under the most sacred ties to perform; and whatever calls off your attention from these, does from that moment cease to be innocent. Here then is the precise point at which you ought to stop. You may be LOVERS OF PLEASURE; it is natural, it is reasonable, for you to be so; but you must not be LOVERS OF PLEASURE, MORE THAN LOVERS OF GOD. This is the true line that separates *harmless gaiety* from *criminal dissipation*. It is a line drawn by the hand of God himself, and he will never suffer it to be passed with impunity. HE claims, on the justest grounds, the first place in your hearts. His laws and precepts are to be the first object of your regard. And be assured, that by suffering them to be so, you will be no losers even in present felicity. It is a truth demonstrable by reason, and confirmed by invariable experience, that a perpetual round of fashionable gaiety, is not the road to real substantial happiness. Ask those who have tried it, and they will all (if they are honest) with one voice declare, that it is not. It is indeed in the very nature of things impossible that it should be so. This world is not calculated to afford, the human mind is not formed to bear, a constant succession of new and exquisite delights. To aim therefore at uninterrupted, unbounded gaiety, to make pleasure so necessary to your existence, that you cannot subsist one moment without it, is to convert every thing that is not absolute pleasure into absolute pain, and to lay the foundation of certain misery. Diversions are of too thin and unsubstantial a nature to fill the whole capacity of a rational mind, or to satisfy the cravings of a soul formed for immortality. They must, they do, tire and disgust; you see it every day; you see men flying from one amusement to another; affecting to be happy,

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yet feeling themselves miserable; fatigued with pursuing their pleasures, yet uneasy without them; growing sick at last of them all, of themselves, and every thing around them; and compelled perhaps at last to have recourse to solitude, without the least provision made for it; without any fund of entertainment within, to render it supportable. From this wretched state it is that religion would preserve you; and the very worst you have to fear from it, is nothing more than such gentle restaints on your gaiety, as tend to promote the very end you have in view, the true enjoyment even of the present life. Suffer it then to do you this kind office; and do not look on Christianity in that gloomy light, in which it sometimes perhaps appears to you. Far from being an enemy to cheerfulness, it is the truest friend to it. That sober and temperate use of diversions, which it allows and recommends, is the surest way to preserve their power to please, and your capacity to enjoy them. At the same time, though it forbids excess in our pleasures, yet it multiplies the number of them; and disposes the mind to receive entertainment from a variety of objects and pursuits, which to the gay part of mankind are absolutely flat and insipid. To a body in perfect health, the plainest food is relishing; and to a soul rightly harmonized by religion, every thing affords delight. Rural retirement, domestic tranquillity, friendly conversation, literary pursuits, philosophical enquiries, works of genius and imagination; nay even the silent beauties of unadorned nature, a bright day, a still evening, a starry hemisphere, are sources of unadulterated pleasure, to those whose taste is not vitiated by criminal indulgences, or debased by trifling ones. And when from these you rise to the still more rational and manly delights of virtue; to that self-congratulation which springs up in the soul from the consciousness of having used your best endeavors to act up to the precepts of the Gospel; of having done your utmost, with the help of Divine Grace, to correct your infirmities, to subdue your passions, to improve your understandings, to exalt

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and purify your affections, to promote the welfare of all within your reach, to love and obey your Maker and your Redeemer; then is human happiness wound up to its utmost pitch; and this world has no higher gratifications to give.

Try then, you, who are in search of pleasurs, try these among the rest; try, above all others, the pleasures of devotion. Think not that they are nothing more than the visions of a heated imagination. They are real, they are exquisite. They are what thousands have experienced, what thousands still experience, what you yourselves may experience if you please. Acquire only a *taste* for devotion, (as you often do for other things of far less value) in the beginning of life, and it will be your support and comfort through the whole extent of it. It will raise you above all low cares, and little gratifications; it will give dignity and sublimity to your sentiments, inspire you with fortitude in danger, with patience in adversity, with moderation in prosperity, with alacrity in all your undertakings, with watchfulness over your own conduct, with benevolence to all mankind. It will be so far from throwing a damp on your other pleasures, that it will give new life and spirit to them, and make all nature look gay around you. It will be a fresh fund of cheerfulness in store for you, when the vivacity of youth begins to droop; and is the only thing that *can* fill up that void in the soul, which is left in it by every earthly enjoyment. It will not like worldly pleasures, desert you, when you have most need of consolation in the hours of solitude, of sickness, of old age; but when once its holy flame is thoroughly lighted up in your breasts, instead of becoming more faint and languid as you advance in years, it will grow brighter and stronger every day; will glow with peculiar warmth and lustre, when your dissolution draws near; will disperse the gloom and horrors of a death-bed; will give you a foretaste, and render you worthy to partake of that FULNESS OF JOY, those pure celestial PLEASURES which are at "God's right hand for evermore*."

* Psal. xvi. 11.

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SERMON XV.

JAMES ii. 10.

Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.

THERE are few passages of Scripture which have given more occasion of triumph to the enemies of Christianity, and more disquiet to some of its friends than that now before us. The former represent it, as a declaration in the highest degree tyrannical, absurd, and unjust; the latter read it with concern and terror, and are apt to cry out, "it is a hard saying, who can hear it* ?" And a hard saying it undoubtedly is, if it is to be understood, as some have contended in all its rigor. But it is not easy to conceive why we are to be bound down to the literal meaning in this particular passage of Scripture, when in several others of the same nature and to the full as strongly expressed, we depart from it without scruple. No man, I suppose, thinks himself obliged to "give (without distinction or exception) to every one that asks him; "to pluck out his right eye, or cut off his right arm; "to offer his coat to him that has taken away his "cloak; or, when his enemy smites him on the right "cheek, to turn to him the other also†." Yet all these things, if we regard the mere words only, are commanded in the Gospel. We all hope and believe, that it is possible for a rich man to be saved, and for a great sinner to repent and amend his life. But looks into

* John vi. 60. † Luke vi. 30. Matth. v. 29. 30. 39. 40.

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the Scriptures, and they tell you, "that it is easier for "a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for "a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God;" and that, if "a leopard can change his spots, and an Ethi- "opian his skin, then may they also do good that are "accustomed to do evil*." These expressions, literally taken, imply *an absolute impossibility*. Yet no interpreter, I believe, ever pretended to infer from them, any thing more than *extreme difficulty*. By what rule of criticism then are we obliged to understand the text more strictly than the passage just mentioned? It certainly stands as much in need of a liberal interpretation, and is as justly entitled to it, as these or any other places of holy writ. Consider it only with a little attention. "Whosoever shall keep the whole "law, and yet offend in one point he is guilty of all." The meaning cannot possibly be, that he who offends in *one* point only, does by that means actually offend in *all* points; for this is a palpable contradiction. Nor can it mean, that he who offends in one point only, is in the eye of God *equally guilty*, and of course will in a future state be *equally punished*, with him who offends in all points: for this is evidently false and unjust; contrary to every principle of reason and equity, to all our ideas of God's moral attributes, and to the whole tenor of the Gospel, which uniformly teaches a directly opposite doctrine. It is therefore not only allowable, it is absolutely necessary, to understand the proposition in the text with some qualification. The only question is, what this qualification shall be. It is a question certainly of the utmost importance, and well worthy our most serious attention. It is not a matter of nice, and curious, and unprofitable speculation. It is a point in which we are all most deeply interested, and the decision of it must be of great moment to every moral agent, who thinks himself bound by the precepts, or looks forward to the rewards of the Gospel.

The common interpretation of the text is this. All the laws of the Christian Revelation are founded upon

* Matth. xix. 24. Jer. xiii. 23.

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one and the same authority of God. Therefore, every offence against any of those laws is a contempt of the authority upon which they all depend, and consequently every act of disobedience is a breach of the whole law, because subversive of that authority on which the whole law stands.

But to this interpretation it has been observed that there is one insuperable objection. It is evidently liable to all the difficulties of the stoical paradox, that all offences are equal. For if the guilt of sin depends not upon the nature and circumstances of the sinful action, but upon the authority of the lawgiver, then *every* sin being an offence against the same authority is of the same guilt and heinousness, and consequently will be subject to the same degree of punishment in a future state: which is clearly repugnant to every idea of equity and justice, and (as we shall see hereafter) to the express declarations of holy writ. We must therefore look to some other explanation of this confessedly difficult passage more consonant to reason and to Scripture.

Now the most probable way of arriving at the true sense of it, is, I conceive, to take into consideration the whole of the context, the persons to whom the Apostle's admonition is addressed, the particular object he had in view, and the particular doctrine which that object required him to establish.

The persons to whom this Epistle of St. James was addressed, were, as he himself tells us, *the twelve tribes that were scattered abroad**; that is, to those who had been converted from Judaism to Christianity, and who of course still retained several of their old Judaical prejudices.

Some of these Jewish Christians had, it seems, been guilty of making very invidious and grating distinctions between the rich and the poor in their religious assemblies; had treated the former with the most flattering marks of respect, and the latter with harshness and contempt. For this the Apostle in the verses preceding the text, very severely reproves them, upbraids

* James i. 1.

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them with the gross partiality they had shown on this occasion, and tells them, that however trivial this sort of injustice might appear to them, it was in fact a very serious offence, because it was a breach of the great evangelical law of charity, which forbids every kind of insult or injury to our poorer brethren*. "If, says he you fulfil the *royal law* according to the Scripture, (that is, the law which says, *thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself)*, ye do well, but if ye have respect of persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors, transgressors of the great royal law of Christian charity or universal love. To this the Jewish convert would have an answer ready, founded on a received maxim, of his former religion. For the Jews entertained an idea that the reason why God gave them so many commandments was, that by keeping *any one* of them they might be saved. This therefore they would urge to the Apostle in their own defence, and would say—"Admitting that we have offended against the law of Christ in one instance, yet as we have observed it in another of great importance, we shall still be entitled to the pardon of our sins, and the rewards of our virtue in a future state." A doctrine so false and pernicious as this, St. James would of course most strenuously oppose, and would naturally express his disapprobation of it in the strongest possible terms that language could supply. No, says he, so far is it from being true, that the observance of one single precept will save you, that the direct contrary doctrine is the true one. "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point he is guilty of all." This is undoubtedly a very strong expression, but the peculiar circumstances of the case called for it; and it must be understood, like many other concise and proverbial

* St. Austin confines the Apostle's meaning entirely and exclusively to offences against this great important law of Christian charity, which both St. James and St. Paul say *is the fulfilling of the law.*

Plenitudo legis est charitas, ac per hoc qui totam legem servaverit si in uno offenderit fit omnium reus, quia contra charitatem facit *unde tota lex pendet.* August. op, tom. ii. Ep. 29. ad Hieronymum. Bishop Sherlock takes up the same idea, and dilates upon it with great ingenuity.—Disc. v. i. D. 13.

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maxims of the same sort, with considerable abatements and allowances for the peculiar idioms and phraseology of the times and the countries where it was used, and with a due consideration also of the occasion which drew it forth, and of the specific object which the speaker had in view. Now his object evidently was to convince the Jewish Christian with whom he was arguing, that he had violated in one material instance, the great royal law of charity; that this was a very heinous offence, and that while he was guilty of this offence, his observance of the law in other respects would avail him nothing. But in order to convince him of this, he was not obliged to go to the length of asserting, that whoever offended in one point was in fact guilty of offending in all points, and would of course be punished hereafter with the same severity as those who had actually offended in all points. This was pushing his argument much further than was necessary for his purpose. All he had to prove was, that whoever violated the divine law in any one important point, was guilty of a great sin, and if that sin was not done away by sincere repentance, and reliance on the merits of Christ, he would assuredly suffer the punishment due to that sin in a future state, notwithstanding his obedience to the law in all other instances. This was the only doctrine which he was called upon and which he meant to establish; and in fact it is the doctrine which he *does* establish in the verse immediately following the text, which clearly explains the meaning of the text itself, and by the illative particle *for*, was evidently *intended* to explain it. For, (says he,) He that said, do not commit adultery, said also, do not kill: now, if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, *thou art become a transgressor of the law*. This is all that he asserts. But if it had been his intention to prove that he who offended in one point, was, strictly speaking, guilty of offending in all points, his conclusion would have been very different; it would have been this. If thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art *become a transgressor of the whole law, in every branch of it*. But he

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says no such thing. He says only, *thou art become a transgressor of the law;* and must consequently expect the punishment due to that transgression, notwithstanding thy observance of it in other respects. And as this verse must in all fair construction be considered as a comment on the text, it clearly ascertains the meaning of it to be what is here stated, and nothing more.*

From this examination and elucidation of the passage before us, the following conclusions may be drawn.

First, that the *offences* which the Apostle had in view throughout the whole of his reasoning, and of which he speaks in the text, were offences against some important branch of the evangelical law, such as that of Christian charity, for that is the very instance which he himself specifies†.

2d. The offences he alludes to are not casual transgressions arising from ignorance, inadvertence, surprize, or mere human infirmity, but wilful and presumptuous sins *habitually* indulged‡. For that violation of Christian charity with which St. James char-

* The truth of the interpretation here given, receives great confirmation from some remarks lately communicated to me by a very learned and ingenious friend of mine. He observes, that the concluding clauses of the 9th, 10th, and 11th verses of the 2d Chapter of St. James, (which we have been here considering) must necessarily be considered as *equivalent* to each other. These three verses are as follows:

V. 9. If ye have respect of persons, ye commit sin, and *are convinced of the law as transgressors.*

V. 10. *For,* whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, *he is guilty of all.*

V. 11. *For,* he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, *thou art become a transgressor of the law.*

To every one that considers these three verses attentively, as connected with each other, and particularly the force of the illative particle *for,* in the two last, it will be evident that the 10th is meant to prove the truth of the 9th, and the 11th of the 10th. But the proof entirely fails, and the 10th and 11th verses are left without meaning, unless the clauses in each verse, which are printed in italics, were intended to convey precisely the same idea. If this be admitted, the sense affixed to the text, in this discourse, is fully established.

† Hoc vult Jacobus.—Si quis observato reliquo Evangelio præceptum unum in re *magni momenti* negligat (quale est præceptum caritatis quo proximum nocere vetamur) perinde esse ac si alia etiam neglecta esseut. *Le Clerc. in Loc.*

Offendat in uno; nempe eorum quibus poena capitalis constituta est. GROTIUS.

‡ Secker's Sermons, vol. vii. s. 3. p. 45.

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ges the Jewish converts appears to have been their constant practice.

3d. That although he who offends in one point will not be deemed equally guilty, or be subject to equal punishment with him who offends in all points; yet still the consequences of indulging himself even in *one* favorite sin will be sufficiently dreadful to deter him from such a practice, and to induce him without delay to repent and reform. If he does not, he will in some *material respects* experience the same consequences, and be treated in the same manner as if he had been actually guilty of offending in all points.

For in the first place, he will be excluded from those glorious rewards hereafter, which, through the merits of our Redeemer, are promised to those that to the best of their power pay a uniform obedience to all the laws of Christ. The gates of heaven are shut against every habitual and unexpiated sin. He who lives and dies in the constant commission of any one presumptuous sin, shall have no more title to a future recompence than if he had been guilty of every sin; and in this sense, by offending in one point, he may not improperly be said to be guilty of all; for the consequence to him with regard to future happiness, will be the same as if he actually had been so.

In the next place, he who is wilfully and habitually guilty of any one presumptuous sin will be certainly doomed to *some* degree of future punishment, as if he had transgressed every divine command instead of one. The Scriptures denounce *tribulation and anguish against every soul of man that doeth evil**. This indeed seems the natural consequence of being excluded from reward. For in our Lord's representation of the last judgment, there are but two classes into which all mankind are divided, the wicked and the good, those who are punished and those who are rewarded. Between these there does not appear to be any middle rank, any neutral set of beings, who are neither punished nor rewarded. The sheep are placed on the right hand, and

* Rom. ii. 9.

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the goats on the left, but we hear of none who have a station assigned them between both. They who do not "go away into life eternal," are ordered to depart into a state of everlasting punishment. And since the offender in one point, cannot be among the first, he must necessarily be among the last. In this then, as well as in the loss of heaven, he shares the fate of him who is guilty of all.

Thus far, then, the partial and the universal sinner agree. They are both excluded from happiness: they are both sentenced to future punishment. But here the resemblance between them ceases, and the parallel must be pushed no further. Here begins the parting point, the line of separation, between the two cases. Here that limitation of the text takes place, which common justice and common sense require. Though the offender in one point, and the offender in all, are both doomed to punishment, yet it is by no means to *equal* punishment. It may be, and probably is, the same in *kind*, but it cannot possibly be the same in *degree*. We have every assurance which reason and Scripture can give, that the future sufferings of sinners will be exactly suited to their respective crimes. The Judge of all the earth will assuredly do right, and all the world shall see and acknowledge the perfect impartiality of his proceedings. Proportionable rewards and punishments, are every where announced in the Gospel in the clearest and most explicit terms. We are told, that "some "shall be beaten with many stripes, and some with "few*," and that "it shall be more tolerable for cer- "tain persons in the day of judgment than for others†," who shall receive "a greater condemnation." Whoever therefore thinks himself authorized by the text to go on from sin to sin, and to accumulate one crime upon another, from a presumption that he shall not suffer more for offending in all points than for offending only in one; and that, after the first deviation from virtue, every subsequent vice may be practised with impunity, will find himself most fatally deceived. As

* Luke xii: 4, 48. † Matt. x. 15.

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sure as God is just, and the Gospel is true, so surely will the judgments of the last day be inflicted on all impenitent offenders, not promiscuously and indiscriminately, but in weight and measure precisely balancing their several demerits. And although from the text we may collect, that any one vice, habitually indulged, will as effectually exclude us from reward, and subject us to punishment, as if we had been guilty of *every* vice; yet the *degrees* of that punishment will be exactly proportioned to the number and the magnitude of the sins we have committed.

That the sense here given to St. James' words is the true one, must, I think, be allowed by every one that will take the trouble of casting his eye on the chapter from whence the text is taken, and that which immediately precedes it. He will see that the apostle's reasoning, throughout a great part of these chapters, is directed against that most dangerous notion, which the heart of man has been at all times but too apt to entertain, and which the Jews more especially, carried to a most extravagant height, *that universal holiness of life is not necessary to salvation;* that a *partial* obedience to the divine law is sufficient to secure both impunity and reward; and, *that many virtues will cover and excuse one favorite vice.* This was the error which the apostle undertook to combat; and in order to do this, it was not (as I have already observed) necessary for him to prove, that he who offends in one point is, literally and strictly speaking, guilty of all. This was going not only beyond all bounds of credibility and truth, but beyond every thing that this argument required. All that this naturally led him to prove was, *that no impenitent offender, even though he offended in one point only, should either obtain reward or escape punishment.* Accordingly, it is this doctrine which he endeavors throughout the whole context to establish. It is this which he lays down with peculiar emphasis in the text; it is this which he inculcates a few verses before, in words nearly as forcible as those in the text, and which will assist us in confirming the interpretation here giv-

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en of it. The words I mean are these: "If any man among you," says he, "seem to be religious, and "bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, "*that man's religion is vain**." Here, you see, is a specification of one particular point (that of *habitual evil-speaking*, in all the worst senses of that word) in which he supposes that a man, in other respects religious and unblameable, offends†. And what does he say of that man? Why, that *his religion is vain*, is unprofitable, is useless to him, will in the last day avail him nothing, will neither entitle him to reward, nor exempt him from punishment. When therefore, within a few verses after this, he resumes the argument, and says "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend "in one point, he is guilty of all," who can have any doubt that he means nothing more than to express, in stronger and more comprehensive terms, the very same doctrine which he had just before laid down with regard to one particular case? The clearness of the former passage reflects light on the obscurity of the latter; and when St. James says, "Whosoever shall "keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, *he* "*is guilty of all*," it is exactly the same as if he had said, "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet "offend in one point, *that man's religion is vain*:" will be of no benefit to him in the great day of retribution. He will be as far from obtaining either impunity or reward, as if he had been guilty of every sin instead of one‡.

The justness of this explanation will, I apprehend, appear in a still stronger light, if we try it (as all explanations of Scripture ought to be tried) by considering in one view the whole passage from whence the text is

* James i. 26. † See Benson in Loc.

‡ There is a very ingenious conjecture of Baulacre's, in Wetstein, on the text in question, James ii. 10. Instead of the common reading, γεγονε παντων ενοχος, he proposes (with a very small variation) γεγονε παντως ενοχος: that is, he is *undoubtedly* guilty, he is *clearly* a transgressor of the law. Just as it is said, Acts xxviii. 4. Παντως φονευς εστιν ο ανθρωπος ουτος "*No doubt* this man is a mur-"derer." Could this emendation be established, it would certain-

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taken, and then subjoining such a paraphrase of it as the meaning here affixed to St. James' words requires. The entire context is as follows:

"If ye fulfil the royal law, according to the scripture, "THOU SHALT LOVE THY NEIGHBOR AS THY-"SELF, ye do well; but if ye have respect to persons, "ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as trans-"gressors. FOR WHOSOEVER SHALL KEEP THE "WHOLE LAW, AND YET OFFEND IN ONE POINT, "HE IS GUILTY OF ALL. For he that said, Do not "commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now, if "thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art "become a transgressor of the law. So speak ye, and "so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of lib-"erty. For he shall have judgment without mercy, "that hath shewed no mercy, and mercy rejoiceth "against judgment."

If the principles advanced in this discourse be true, and the conclusions just, the sense of this very obscure passage will be what is here subjoined.

If you fulfil the great law of LOVING YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELVES, (which, having been adopted, explained, and enforced by our SPIRITUAL SOVEREIGN, CHRIST, and made one of the two great branches of his religion, may be justly called the ROYAL LAW); if, I say, you fulfil this law in all its various parts, you do well. But if you show such an uncharitable respect of persons as I have specified above, you thereby violate that royal law, you commit a great sin, and must expect the punishment due to that sin. There is indeed, I know, a doctrine prevalent among you, which some of you may be apt to think will secure you from this punishment. You have been told by your Jewish instructors, not only that a life of vir-

ly remove all difficulty. But it is not supported by any manuscript. And I doubt much whether the word ενοχος is ever used by any good writer, *singly* and *absolutely* to signify *guilty*. It is generally found in construction with some noun to which it has a reference, and by which its sense is determined. Thus it is said Matt. v. 21. ενοχος τη κρισει; and, xxvi. 66. ενοχος θανατου; and in Demosthenes, and other classical writers, ενοχος τοις νομοις, &c.

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tue in general will atone for the habitual practice of any single vice, but, that, if you observed punctually *any one great precept of the law*, and violated all the rest, it should be well with you, and your days should be prolonged, and you should possess the earth*. You may therefore possibly flatter yourselves, that although you do perpetually transgress the great law of charity by an undue respect of persons, yet, on account of your obedience to the moral law in other instances, you will not only escape punishment, but obtain reward. But this is a most dangerous and delusive notion. It is one of those old Judaical prejudices that still retain their hold upon your minds, where they have been early and deeply impressed by the corrupt traditions and false glosses of your rabbinical interpreters of the law. But be not deceived. It is so far from being true, as you have been taught to think, that *he who observes one great precept of the law, observes the whole*, that the very reverse of this is the truth. For I say unto you, that WHOSOEVER SHALL KEEP the WHOLE LAW, AND YET OFFEND IN ONE POINT, HE IS GUILTY OF ALL; *so far*, I mean, *guilty of all*, that he shall be no more entitled either to impunity or to reward, than if he had transgressed in every point, instead of one. For you know very well, that "HE "WHO SAID, DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, SAID "ALSO, DO NOT KILL." Every precept of the law proceeds from the same divine lawgiver. If therefore "you commit no adultery, yet if you kill," if you observe one command and break another, you rebel against that divine lawgiver, you plainly become a transgressor of his law in *one* instance, and must consequently suffer the punishment annexed *to that transgression*, notwithstanding the punctuality of your obedience in all other instances. This perhaps you will think a hard saying, and may have entertained hopes that you should experience more indulgent treatment under the law of the Gospel, which you have so often heard emphatically styled THE LAW OF LIBERTY.

* See Pocock on Hosea xiv. 2. p. 683; and Whitby on James ii. 11.

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And such, in many important senses, it certainly is. It has delivered you from the heavy yoke of ceremonial observances; it has set you free from the "curse of "the law, from the ministration of death, from the letter "that killeth," and has called you into "the glorious "liberty of the children of God*." "So SPEAK YE, "then, AND SO DO AS THEY THAT SHALL undoubt-"edly BE JUDGED BY THE LAW OF LIBERTY." But mistake not the nature of this LIBERTY. Do not fancy it to be a liberty of transgressing any precept which you find it difficult to observe. Though the Gospel has emancipated you from the slavery of the *ritual* law, yet it has not in the smallest degree released you from the obligations of the *moral law*. On the contrary, it confirms and establishes that law. Were it to allow, or even connive at, the indulgence of any one favorite passion, it would be a law, not of *liberty*, but of *licentiousness*. It will not therefore, it cannot, suffer the breach even of one single divine command to pass unpunished. HE, consequently, "SHALL HAVE "JUDGMENT WITHOUT MERCY, THAT HATH SHEW-"ED NO MERCY:" he that transgresses the great law of *mercy*, or Christian charity, shall not, on account of his obedience in other respects, be exempted by the *mercy* of God from the punishment due to that offence. But if, on the contrary, he uses his best endeavors to fulfil every precept in the Gospel, and especially that most important one of *mercy*, or *universal love*, then shall "MERCY REJOICE AGAINST JUDGMENT:" his casual transgressions and infirmities shall meet with *mercy* at the hand of his Almighty Judge; and the same compassion shall at the last day be graciously extended to him, which he himself has shewn to his offending or his distressed fellow-creatures.

* Gal. iii. 13. 2 Cor. iii. 7. Rom. viii. 21.

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SERMON XVI.

JAMES, ii. 10.

Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.

IT has, I hope, been sufficiently proved, that the interpretation given of these words, in the preceding discourse, is not arbitrary and conjectural; but grows out of the context and the occasion, and is conformable to the the whole tenor of St. James' argument, and the particular object he had in view. It makes no greater abatement in the apostle's expression, than the peculiar ardor and energy of the Scripture language, and the concise sententiousness of proverbial maxims, absolutely require; no greater than is authorized by the soundest rules of criticism, and the practice of the soberest expositors in many similar instances. At the same time, it seems to stand clear of all the objections which have been usually urged against the text. It leaves no room to charge it with extravagant and undistinguishing severity, and the doctrine it presents to us is confirmed by the whole tenor of holy writ.

Every one in the least conversant with Scripture must know, that the rewards of Christianity are there promised to those only who, to the best of their power, endeavor "to stand perfect and complete in all the "will of God*;" and that its punishments are denounced against every habitual sin of every kind,

* Col. iv. 12.

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without any exception made in favor of those who offend in one point only, and observe all the rest*. And as this is the universal language of Scripture, so is it perfectly conformable to every principle of reason, justice, and equity.

In regard to a future recompence, the case will not admit a doubt. Eternal life being the free and voluntary gift of God, he may certainly give it on whatever terms he thinks fit to prescribe. The terms he *has* prescribed are, *faith in Christ*, and *obedience to all his laws*. Whoever therefore does not comply with the terms required, can have no claim to the favor granted on those terms, and those only. Although the offender in one point may possibly go so far as to flatter himself that he shall not be *punished* for his offence, yet he can never surely expect to be *rewarded* for it. It would indeed be strange, if all who had only one favorite vice should be admitted to a state of felicity hereafter. For, since different men are, by their different inclinations, led to transgress in different ways, it must by this means come to pass, that sinners of every denomination would find their way to heaven. And thus, instead of meeting there, as we are taught to expect, with "the spirits of just men made perfect†," and an illustrious assembly of saints and angels, we should find ourselves surrounded, in the very mansions of bliss, with such sort of company as we should be ashamed to be seen in upon earth.

Nothing therefore can be more undeniably reasonable and just, than that the habitual transgressor of any one divine command, should be excluded from future happiness. Yet still perhaps it may be thought hard, that he should be doomed to future misery. There is scarce any thing we are apt to think so reasonable, and so natural, as that a number of good qualities should atone for one bad habit, and shelter us from punishment, at least, if not entitle us to reward. Yet why should we expect this from the Gospel dispensation, when in the ordinary course of God's providence we

* Rom. ii. 9. † Heb. xii. 23.

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find it quite otherwise? How often do we see, in the affairs of this world, not only that *one habitual vice*, but that *one single wrong action*, will, in spite of a thousand excellencies, draw after it the ruin of fortune, fame, and every earthly comfort? The case is the same in the œconomy of nature, and the artificial institutions of civil society. The health of the human body is the result of perfect order in every part. If the slightest member be indisposed, it disturbs the ease of the whole, and "every member suffers with it." In the body politic a complete obedience to the laws is the only title to the protection of the state; and a single crime, notwithstanding all our other services, will render us obnoxious to its punishments. Add to this, that in all compacts and covenants which we enter into with one another, concerning our worldly affairs, the breach of any one essential condition vacates the covenant, and deprives us of all the benefits we claim under it. Now, the title we have to everlasting happiness hereafter is founded solely, not on the precarious ground of our own imperfect services; for "we "are all unprofitable servants*;" but on the sure basis of that efficacious covenant, which was made between God and us through the mediation of our Redeemer, and which he sealed with his own blood upon the cross. All the precepts of the Gospel are so many conditions of this covenant, which we have promised, and which we are bound to observe. If therefore we wilfully and habitually violate any one of these conditions, though we religiously observe all the rest, we evacuate the covenant, we forfeit our *federal right* (the only right we have) to the pardon of our sins, and consequently lay ourselves open again to the punishment that is naturally due to them. Where then can be the ground for complaining of severity in this respect? What pretence can we have for murmuring at our Judge, if he observes the same measures of justice in the next world, which the general course of his providence in this gives us reason to expect; if he treats

* Luke xvii. 10.

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us, in a future state, with no greater rigor than we ourselves, in our most important concerns, think it equitable and prudent to exercise towards each other?

But will not God then judge us in mercy? Will he have no compassion on human infirmity? Will he be extreme to mark and to punish every thing that is done amiss, notwithstanding the punctuality of our obedience in all other respects?

That God will judge us in mercy there can be no doubt; what, alas! would become of the very best of us, if he did not? But that he will suffer his mercy to annihilate his justice, by allowing any one of his laws to be insulted with impunity, is what no reasonable man can possibly suppose. We need not be much afraid of leaving no room for the exercise of mercy. After we have done all we can, after we have kept the whole law, without exception, with all the care and punctuality we are able; there will be still enough left for God to pardon, and the most perfect of us will have abundant occasion for the utmost display of his clemency towards us. In our observance of *every* law, there will be innumerable defects and errors, which are the proper objects of divine compassion. These he has promised to forgive, on our sincere repentance, for the sake and through the merits of Christ Jesus; and on the same grounds we have good reason to hope that great allowance will be made for such failings and infirmities as we watch and strive and pray against, and persevere in opposing. But we must not expect the same mercy to be extended to any wilful and presumptuous transgression, if habitually persisted in, without repentance and reformation. And even with regard to our best virtues, if they can, with all their own blemishes, obtain acceptance through the intercession of our Redeemer, they do full as much as we have any reason to expect from them. They have no superabundant merit of their own; and can therefore have none to spare for other purposes, to serve as a covering for some favorite sin.

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The result then of the whole is, that the only sure ground of admission to heaven, and of security against future punishment, is reliance on the merits of our Redeemer, and an unreserved (though too often, God knows, imperfect) obedience to *every* precept in the Gospel. There is indeed always *one* which we find it more difficult to observe that the rest, and which for that reason we are very desirous not to observe at all. But if we are in earnest about our everlasting welfare, our obedience in *this* point also, however painful, is indispensably necessary. It is that cross which we are ordered to take up when we are commanded to follow Christ. It is the yoke he imposes upon us, the burden he requires us to bear. To decline this, is at once to reject the terms of our salvation, and to forfeit all pretensions to divine favor. It is to no purpose to urge the exactness of our obedience in *other* instances. Our good deeds can be no otherwise acceptable in the sight of God, than as they flow from a principle of love to him, and obedience to his laws, as revealed to us in the Gospel of his blessed Son. But if we constantly transgress these laws in any one important point, it is impossible that our observance of the rest should proceed from any religious motive. If such a motive influenced us in *some* points, it would influence us in *every* point, and would never allow us, in any instance, to persist in a direct opposition to the commands of the God we loved. The love of ourselves, the love of power, of praise, of pleasure, of gain, may in many cases lead us to virtue; and it will be evident that we followed no worthier guides, if, when they lead us to vice, we follow them without reluctance, and are as ready to *break* any of God's laws at their suggestion, as to *observe* them.

Let us bring this matter home to our own bosoms, let us judge from our own sentiments and feelings on similar occasions. Should we think that man a sincere friend to us, who, where it coincided with his natural propensities, where it flattered his vanity or indulged

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his pride, where it served his ambition or promoted his interest, would very readily show us any mark of kindness and regard; but, where it thwarted any of these views, would most shamefully desert us, although in the utmost need of his assistance? Or, should we think that servant worthy of his hire, and of our favor, who, although in other points he behaved well, yet in one material part of his business, where his service was most necessary, and most acceptable to us, acted in direct opposition to our express orders? Should we not call the one a deceitful friend, and the other a worthless servant, and renounce them both, with the contempt and indignation they deserved? And how then can we imagine that God will accept such a service at our hands, as the meanest man amongst us would think an insult upon him? How can we suppose that he will be content with the leavings of our passions; will be satisfied with our observance of those laws which we have not perhaps the least inclination or temptation to transgress; and overlook our disobedience in that *only point* where we *can* show the sincerity of our attachment to him; where our passions and our interests interfere with our duty, and strongly prompt us to rebel against our Maker?

"Let then every one that names the name of Christ "depart from iniquity*" of every kind. Let him "eschew his own peculiar wickedness." Let him take a resolution of immediately repenting of and relinquishing that favorite sin which does most easily beset him; and if his repentance is sincere, and his reformation effectual, his past offences will for the sake, and through the merits of Christ (who came into the world for the very purpose of saving *sinners*) be forgiven and blotted out; and he will be restored to the favor of God, and received into the arms of his mercy. But if on the contrary he wilfully and obstinately persists through life in any one presumptuous and habitual sin, he will be as effectually excluded from reward, and

* 2 Tim. ii. 14.

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subjected to *some* degree of punishment, as if he had offended in all points instead of one.

This is the true, the genuine doctrine of holy writ. The doctrine of the world, I know, is of a very different complexion; and we have been favored with systems of morality, and plans of education, of a much more compliant, and commodious, and indulgent temper*. The substance of them is comprized in a few words; "adulation to those we despise, courtesy to "those we hate, connections without friendship, pro-"fessions without meaning, good humor without be-"nevolence, good manners without morals, appear-"ances saved and realities sacrificed." These are the maxims which are now to enlighten and improve mankind; and as they come recommended with every advantage that wit, and ease, and elegance of composition, can give them, there is but too much reason to apprehend that a large part of the rising generation will receive these oracles with implicit faith, and consider their authority as sovereign and supreme in some of the most essential articles of moral conduct. The times did not seem to call for any new encouragements to licentiousness. But what else can be expected, when (as the prophet complains) "men forsake the fountain of liv-"ing water, and hew them out cisterns, broken cisterns, "that can hold no water†;" when, deserting the plain road of moral rectitude which Revelation sets before them, they strike out into devious and crooked paths, and form a fanciful system of their own, in which every thing is modelled exactly to their mind; in which vices are transformed into virtues, and virtues into vices, just as it happens to suit their particular taste and convenience? Can there possibly be a more convincing proof of the utter inability of human wisdom, even in its most improved and exalted state, to undertake the direction of our moral behavior, and the absolute necessity of light from above to guide our steps aright,

* The well-known letters, of a deceased nobleman to his son, were published a few months before this sermon was preached at St. James'.

† Jeremiah ii. 13.

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even in what we are pleased to call this *enlightened age?* Can any thing more clearly show the infinite obligations we are under to Christianity, for taking this important business out of the hands of man, and placing it in the hands of God; for marking out to us one straight undeviating line of conduct, and forbidding us, under the severest penalties, to turn aside from it "to the right hand or to the left?" Who does not now see the wisdom, the reasonableness, the utility of the doctrine in the text, that "whosoever shall keep "the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is "guilty of all?" Who does not see, that to recede one tittle from *the true meaning* of this declaration, is to open a door for the admission of every imaginable iniquity? When once we begin to question the necessity of *universal holiness;* when once we begin to make laws for ourselves, and to determine peremptorily that *this* virtue is illiberal, and *that* impracticable, *this* vice a pardonable frailty, and *that* a necessary accomplishment, it is easy to perceive, that there must soon be an end of all distinction between right and wrong. If one man, for instance, thinks that adultery and hypocrisy are in certain circumstances, and on certain occasions allowable; why may not another claim the like indulgence for anger, pride, ambition, or revenge, and rank *them* also in the number of genteel and reputable vices? There is, in fact, hardly a crime in nature which has not somewhere or other a patron and defender. And thus, if every man, instead of eschewing his own peculiar wickedness, is to have an exemption granted him from every restraint which he happens to think inconvenient, the duties of religion will be all picked out of the gospel one by one, till there is not a single virtue left, which may not be evaded whenever we think fit.

This instance then, among a thousand others, may serve to convince us, how dangerous it would be to allow the smallest latitude in the terms and measures of obedience; and how necessary it is for those, who are

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the appointed guardians of EVANGELICAL TRUTH, to watch over it with unremitted vigilance; and on no account to lower the sublime tone of Gospel morality, in order to make it speak a softer language, and accommodate it to the fanciful conceits and corrupt casuistry of worldly wisdom. Men may undoubtedly *act* by whatever rule they please; but the rule by which they will be *judged* is that of the gospel; and all that *we* can do is to lay it plainly and fairly before them, and warn them loudly of the danger of following any other guide. They *may* fancy, if they will, that improved and elevated minds are above *vulgar restraints;* that what is vice in a low station, by ascending into a superior region, leaves its dregs behind, and is sublimated into virtue; that dissimulation, though a base coin, is a necessary one*; and that the grossest irregularities, when they help to embellish our manners, are not vices of the heart, but little infirmities of youth, which are sure to meet with indulgence here, and impunity hereafter. If men of ingenuity *chuse* to amuse themselves with such imaginations as these; and if others think it prudent to take *them* for their guide rather than *God*, they must do it at their own peril. But they who pretend to any principle, or any religion, will do well to remember, that *He* who has the sole right of regulating our conduct, and who alone can inform us on what terms he will receive or reject us for ever, *He* has prescribed to us a very different course of behavior. He requires from us, not merely the *appearance*, but the *reality;* not the "form only, "but the power of godliness." He holds out the same rule of life to high and low, to rich and poor: "He re-"gardeth not the persons of men;" and if he has given any one human being "a licence to sin," let that licence be produced. He commands us not to *conform* to a corrupt world, not to *flatter* and *dissemble*, in order to please and deceive all mankind, but, "IN

* A *heathen* moralist was, however, it seems of a different opinion. Ex omni vita simulatio & dissimulatio tollenda est, Cic. De Off. l. iii. c. 15.

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"SIMPLICITY AND GODLY SINCERITY to have our "conversation in the world*." What *some* call pardonable infirmities, *He* calls vices of the heart; and plainly tells us that *they defile the man*†. And to cut off all hopes of indulgence to any favorite sin, even though surrounded with a constellation of virtues, he declares, that "whosoever shall keep the whole law, "and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all."

* 2 Cor. i. 12. † Matth. xv. 18.

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SERMON XVII.

Luke iv. 17, 18, 19, 20.

And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias: and when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written,

The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind; to set at liberty them that are bruised,

To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down; and the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him.

IN this manner did our gracious Redeemer open his divine commission; with a dignity and a tenderness, both of language and of sentiment, which we shall in vain look for in any other public teacher of religion. We may easily conceive that after he had uttered this noble prophecy, "the eyes of all them that "were in the synagogue" would be "fastened on him." "They all immediately bare him witness, and wonder-"ed at the gracious words that proceeded out of his "mouth*." This admiration indeed of theirs soon gave way to far other emotions, and, in consequence of the just reproof they received from him, for their perverse and senseless prepossessions against him "they were filled with wrath, and thrust him out of

* Luke iv. 20, 22.

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their city*." But we, who have no such prejudices and passions as theirs to mislead our judgments and overpower our natural feelings, must necessarily be filled with love and reverence towards him, when we read that sublime and affecting declaration of his intentions, which is conveyed in the words of the text. We cannot but perceive that "the Spirit of the Lord "was indeed upon him," and that he was in truth the person to whom the passage in Isaiah, which he recited, evidently referred. We know that our Lord most completely verified the words of the prophet, both in their literal and their spiritual meaning. He preached the Gospel to the poor in fortune, the poor in spirit, and the poor in religious knowledge. He healed the broken-hearted; he raised and comforted those that were oppressed with calamity, with disease, and with sin. To him that was bowed down, with infirmity either of body or of soul, his language was, "Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee; "go in peace, and sin no more." "He strengthened "the weak hands, and confirmed the feeble knees; "he said to them that were of a fearful heart, Be "strong, fear not, behold your God will come. He "will come, and save you†." "He gave sight also to "the blind;" he removed the film from the mental, as well as from the corporeal eye; and to those that "sat "in darkness, and in the shadow of death," he disclosed at once the cheerful light of day, and the still more glorious light of divine truth. "To the cap-"tives," to them that were "bruised, he preached "deliverance." He preached a doctrine which not only released from spiritual bondage those that had been enthralled and led captive by their sins, but so softened and subdued the most ferocious minds, and diffused throughout the earth such a spirit of mildness, gentleness, mercy, and humanity, that the heavy chains of personal slavery were gradually broken in most parts of the Christian world; and they that had

* Luke iv. 28, 29. † Isaiah xxxv. 3, 4.

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been for so many ages *bruised* by the cruel and oppressive hand of pagan masters, were at length set free.

Thus did our blessed Lord accomplish what the prophet foretold, and what he, by the inspiration of that "spirit which was upon him," so explicitly applied to himself. It is therefore evidently incumbent on those who are the appointed teachers of his religion, and more especially on that VENERABLE SOCIETY, whose professed design and province is THE PROPAGATION OF HIS GOSPEL IN FOREIGN PARTS, to tread as nearly as they can in the steps of their heavenly Master, and carry on, to the best of their abilities, that gracious and benevolent work which he begun. It was plainly one great purpose of his life to relieve misery of ever kind, and under every shape; and his chief attention was, agreeably to his declaration in the text, bestowed on the most indigent, the most ignorant, the most helpless, and the most wretched of the human species. Too many there are, God knows, in every quarter of the unenlightened world, who stand in need of our compassionate assistance towards the relief of their wants, both temporal and spiritual; and it is a most melancholy consideration, that so large a part of the habitable globe continues still unacquainted with the blessings of true religion. But there is *one class* of our fellow-creatures which has such distinguished pre-eminence in misery of almost every kind, and which so exactly corresponds to all that variety of wretchedness enumerated in the text, that one would almost be tempted to think our Saviour actually alluded to them, and had their case among the other great events of futurity, in his eye. For when he speaks of the "poor, the broken-hearted, the blind, the cap-"tive, the bruised," who can forbear thinking on that unhappy race of beings, the AFRICAN SLAVES in our West Indian Colonies? If there are any human creatures in the world who concentrate in themselves every species of evil here enumerated, who are at once poor, and broken-hearted, and blind, and captive, and bruised, our Negro-slaves are beyond all

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comparison those creatures. Even in a literal sense, this description is in several circumstances a just picture of their situation; but, in a figurative and spiritual meaning, it may, with the strictest truth, be applied to them. They are in general considered as mere machines and instruments to work with, as having neither understandings to be cultivated nor souls to be saved. To the greater part, not so much as the mere ceremony of baptism is administered; and scarce any enjoy sufficient leisure or assistance for a proper degree of instruction in the doctrines and the duties of religion. Sunday is indeed a day which they are generally indulged with for their own use; but they spend it commonly, not in attending public worship, or receiving private instruction, but in visiting and trafficking with eac hother, or in cultivating their own little allotments of land, for which, except in one island, that of Jamaica, they have seldom any other time allowed them.* Thus it comes to pass, that in the British islands alone there are upwards of four hundred thousand human beings†, of whom much the greatest part live most literally without God in the world; without any knowledge of a Creator or Redeemer; without any one principle either of natural or revealed religion; without the idea of one moral duty, except that of performing their daily task, and escaping the scourge that constantly hangs over them. The consequence is, that they are heathens, not only in their hearts, but in their lives, and knowing no distinction between vice and virtue, they give themselves up freely to the grossest immoralities, without so much as being conscious that they are doing wrong‡.

* There is even a *market* held in the island on Sundays, to which the slaves resort; a profanation of the Lord's Day as needless as it is irreverent. See Long's *Hist. of Jamaica*, vol. ii. p. 491, 492.

† The number of slaves in the several West India islands now in our possession, or restored to us by the treaty of the present year 1783, were, a short time before the war, said to be about 410,000. The Negroes in the French islands were, in 1777, computed at 386,500. The Abbe Raynal states the whole number of African slaves in America and the West Indian islands at 1,400,000. *Hist. Phil.* vol. iv. p. 15.

‡ We are informed, on good authority, that the Negroes are allowed an *unlimited indulgence* in those vices which are expressly reprobated by the Christian doctrine. Long's *Hist. of Jamaica*, vol. ii. p, 409, 414, 424.

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A condition such as this, in which so many thousands of our unoffending fellow-creatures are involved, cannot but excite the compassion of every feeling heart; and it must be matter of no small surprize, and of the deepest concern, that, excepting a few instances, which deserve the highest praise, no effectual means have yet been put in practice, either on the part of those individuals who are most nearly interested in the welfare of these poor wretches, or of the government under which they live, to rescue them out of this spiritual captivity, so much worse than even that temporal one (heavy as it is) to which they are condemned. Almost the only considerable attempts that have been made to deliver them from this deplorable state of ignorance, have been made by this venerable Society; which has had this object, among others, constantly in view, and in the prosecution of it has not been sparing either of labor or expense. But it must be owned that our endeavors have not hitherto been attended with the desired success. This, however, has been owing, not to what some are willing to suppose, an impossibility in the nature of the thing itself; not to any absolute incapacity in the Africans to receive or retain religious knowledge (a pretence contradicted by the best testimony, and by repeated experience) but to *accidental*, and, I trust, *surmountable* causes: to the prejudices formerly entertained by many of the planters against the instruction and conversion of their slaves; to the want which the latter have experienced of sufficient time and opportunity for this purpose; to the abject, depressed, degraded, uncivilized, unbefriended, immoral state, in which the Negroes have been so long suffered to remain; to the very little attention paid to them on the part of government; to the almost total want of laws to protect and encourage them, and to soften, in some degree, the rigors of their condition*; to the necessity, in short, which the So-

* The regulations that have been formerly made in the British West India islands, respecting the slaves, breathe a spirit of extreme severity and rigor. There are laws in abundance to *punish*, but scarce any to *protect*, them. Even the wilful murder of a Negro, from *wantonness* (as the law expresses

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ciety itself has hitherto been under of listening to other claims of a very pressing and important nature; and of employing a large share of its fund in disseminating religious knowledge, and providing for the maintenance of public worship in other parts of his majesty's dominions, where its assistance was much wanted, and most earnestly and repeatedly solicited.

These, I apprehend, are the principal obstacles which have hitherto retarded the general conversion of the Negroes. But what then are we to do? Are we utterly to abandon this great concern, to consider it as a desperate, impracticable, visionary project, to renounce all hopes of ever making any effectual progress in it, and, of course, to consign over several hundred thousands of our fellow-creatures to the grossest ignorance, irreligion, and heathenism for ever? It is impossible that any such idea should ever enter into our minds. On the contrary, we shall certainly consider the failure of our former attempts as a strong and powerful call upon us to redouble our diligence and activity in this most laudable undertaking; and the impediments we have hitherto met with, far from extinguishing or abating our honest zeal, will on the contrary, animate us with fresh ardor, and put us upon trying *new expedients* to surmount them. If such be our resolution, there are the strongest reasons to believe that our generous efforts will finally be crowned with success. There are at present several favorable circumstances, which may well inspire us with hopes of a more prosperous issue to our pious labors. Many excellent tracts have within these few years been published, both in this and other countries, on the subject of Negro-slavery; and a still more excellent one will, I hope, soon see the light*; all which can hardly fail by de-

it) and *bloody-mindedness*, is, in Barbadoes, punished only by a small pecuniary fine. Some undoubtedly meet with kind and indulgent masters, whose natural humanity stands in the place of laws; but in general it is to be feared they feel most sensibly the want of LEGAL PROTECTION.

* Mr. Ramsay's *Essay on the Treatment of the Negro Slaves in the British West India Islands*. This was one of the first Tracts on the subject, which excited the attention of the public, and contributed perhaps more than any other to the parliamentary enquiry into the nature of the slave-trade, which

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grees to remove the prejudices (if any still remain) of the West Indian planters, and excite the attention of Government to this most important object; which must satisfy the former that it is not only their duty but their interest to consult a little more both the present comfort and the future salvation of their slaves: and must convince the latter that it highly becomes the wisdom of the provincial legislatures to give some countenance to the wretched Africans who are under their power, and to enact, as the French government has long since done, a CODE OF LAWS for their protection, their security, their encouragement, their improvement, and their conversion*. In fact, several of the most wealthy and most worthy proprietors of West India estates, resident as well in this country as

a few years afterwards took place. With the author of it, Mr. Ramsay, I was well acquainted, having been forseveral years a near neighbor to him in Kent. And I think it an act of justice, due to his worth and his great exertions, to say, that he was a man of distinguished pietey, integrity, humanity, and veracity. But his work raised up against him such a host of enemies, and such a torrent of obloquy and invective poured in upon him from every quarter, that he sunk under the storm which assailed him, and became, in some degree at least, a victim to the important contest in which he had so warmly engaged. It was, however, a source of inexpressible comfort and satisfaction to him, in his last moments, that he had so strenuously exerted himself in such a cause.——FEB. 28, 1803.

* The system of laws here alluded to, is called the CODE NOIR, and was first published in the year 1685. That copy of it which I have seen was printed at Paris in 12mo. 1767. It contains many admirable regulations respecting the diet, the clothing, the treatment, the government, the discipline, the morals, and the religion of the Negroes. Amongst other things, it obliges every planter to have his Negroes baptized, and properly instructed in the doctrines and duties of Christianity. It allows the slaves for these purposes, and for days of rest, not only *every Sunday*, but *every festival usually observed by the Romish church*. It does not permit any *market* to be held on Sundays or holydays. It prohibits, under severe penalties, all masters and managers from corrupting their female slaves. It does not allow the Negro husband, wife, and infant children, to be sold separately. It obliges the owners to maintain their old, infirm, and decrepid slaves. It forbids them the use of torture, or of immoderate and inhuman punishments. If the Negroes are not fed and clothed as the laws prescribe, or if they are in any respect cruelly treated, they may apply to the *Procureur*, who is obliged by his office to protect and redress them. Such is the humane attention of the French nation to their slaves. Many excellent laws have also been made in favor of the Indians employed by the Spaniards in South America. And besides these, every district of Indians has a PROTECTOR; clergymen, paid by government, are appointed to instruct them; and the principal ecclesiastics are empowered to inform and admonish the civil magistrates, if any Indians are deprived of their just rights. The Negroes live there not only in ease but in luxury. See *Robertson's History of America*, 1st edit. 4to. vol. ii. p. 350, 368, 374, 377, 493.

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in the Islands, have of late begun to see this matter in the right point of view. They have given repeated injunctions to their agents and managers, both to mitigate the hardships and promote the instruction of their Negroes; and the planters in general are no longer alarmed with an imagination which was formerly entertained, that when their Negroes become Christians, they cease to be slaves; and that in proportion as they are more religious, they grow less faithful, active, and industrious. Add to this, that the last war, amidst a multitude of evils such as war necessarily produces, has been attended with one accidental effect, which whatever may be thought of it in a commercial view, I do not scruple, in a religious one, to call a blessing. It has very greatly impeded and diminished that opprobrious traffic, in which this country has for a long time taken the lead, *the slave-trade on the coast of Africa.* The consequence of this has been that several of the West India planters have been induced to treat their slaves, especially the females and their children, with more than ordinary tenderness and indulgence, in order to supply their want of Negroes by their own natural population.* Should thise wise and humane practice become an established and universal custom, it would exceedingly facilitate the work both of instruction and conversion, by furnishing a succession of young Negro catechumens, well acquainted with the English language, familiarised to the Engligh customs, and uncorrupted by those heathenish principles and savage manners with which the constant importation of fresh

* There can be little doubt but that this might easily be effected by proper care and attention, by granting particular privileges, rewards, and even freedom, to the mothers of large families; by allowing more ease and better nourishment to the Negroes; by impressing early and strongly upon their minds the belief and the practice of the Christian religion, which can alone restrain that unbounded and promiscuous commerce with their women, which (by the acknowledgment of the planters themselves) is the principal obstacle to their natural increase; and by a variety of other expedients, which humanity and sound policy would naturally dictate. And although this might be attended perhaps at first with some trifling expense, and with some small abatement of present exertion; yet all this would be amply overpaid by the prodigious savings of what is usually expended in the purchase of fresh slaves, and by the great and acknowledged superiority of home-born Negroes to those imported from Africa. See Long's *History of Jamaica*, p. 436, 437, 439.

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slaves from Africa has never failed to infect them, and to obliterate in a few weeks all those sentiments of morality and religion which it had been the work of years to impress upon their minds.

These surely are considerations which afford the Society much fairer prospects of success than it has ever yet had. The harvest in this quarter promises to be much more plenteous than we have hitherto found it, and may well encourage us to bestow more of our attention upon it, and to send more laborers into it.—Whenever this resolution is taken, we shall undoubtedly think it necessary and right to begin with the Negroes on our trust-estates in Barbadoes* ; to try how far the work of conversion can actually be carried, to put in practice every possible expedient, first to civilize, and then to make them, what they undoubtedly may be made, not merely *nominal*, but *real* Christians. The Society has indeed always shewn a most laudable solicitude both for the temporal and eternal welfare of the slaves employed on their plantations. They have given the most positive and peremptory orders to their managers to treat them with the utmost tenderness and humanity. They have appointed a catechist for the sole purpose of instructing them in the doctrines and duties of Christianity. They have taken care that their Negroes shall be regularly summoned to divine worship, and enjoy, without interruption, the sacred rest they are entitled to on the Lord's Day. For this purpose they have allowed them for their own use the afternoon also of the preceding day ; and their journals are full of the strongest and most earnest injunctions to their catechist to exert his utmost zeal in impressing a right sense of religion on the minds of their slaves ; a point which the Society declare in their letters that *it is impossible for them ever to give up*†. These, it must be owned, are wise and truly Christian regulations, and highly suitable to the character of this venerable Society. But it is greatly to be doubted

* Certain lands in Barbadoes, bequeathed to the Society by General Codrington *in trust* for particular uses specified in his will.

† See the Society's Journals, 1769.

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whether these directions have always been punctually complied with in the degree and to the extent proposed; or if they have, there is but too much reason to fear, that they have by no means fully answered the good intentions of the Society. The truth is, these are *excellent beginnings*, but they are *only* beginnings of an effectual and vital conversion of the Negroes. A foundation is laid, but it must be laid, I apprehend, still broader and deeper before it will bear a superstructure of sufficient strength and solidity, "and so "fitly framed together as to grow into a holy temple "unto the Lord, and a permanent habitation of God "through the spirit*." It is, in short the clear and decided opinion of every man who has considered the subject thoroughly, and has had opportunities of observing and studying for a long course of years, the temper, the disposition, the manners, the capacities, the treatment, and the condition of our Negro-slaves, that in their present state of debasement and degradation, sunk as they are below the level of the human species; treated merely as animals doomed to labor; cut off almost entirely from the protection of the state, and the advantages of social life, with scarce any substantial comforts and indulgences to cheer their spirits, to excite their ambition, to encourage their hopes, they are hardly capable of receiving any deep and lasting impressions of religion. In fact, a certain degree of improvement and civilization has been always found necessary to prepare the mind for the admission of the divine truths of Revelation: and, unless the soil is a little tilled and dressed, and meliorated by a proper course of cultivation, the good seed will scarce ever strike root in it, or at least take such firm hold upon it as to spring up with health and vigor, and "bring "forth fruit to perfection." If ever then we hope to make any considerable progress in our benevolent purpose of communicating to our Negroes the benefits and the blessings of religion, we must first give them some of the benefits and the blessings of society and of

* Ephes. ii. 21, 22.

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civilized government. We must, as far as is possible, attach them and their families inseparably to the soil; must give them a little interest in it; must indulge them with a few rights and privileges to be anxious for; must secure them by fixed laws from injury and insult; must inform their minds, correct their morals, accustom them to the restraints of legal marriage, to the care of a family and the comforts of domestic life; must improve and advance their condition gradually, *as they are able to bear it;* and even allow a certain number of the most deserving to work out their freedom by degrees (according to the plan said to be established in some of the Spanish settlements) as a reward of superior merit and industry, and of an uncommon progress in the knowledge and the practice of Christianity*.

All this may be done, as they who are best acquainted with the subject have asserted, and I think proved, without the smallest injury to the rights, the property, or the emoluments of the planter; and were a plan of this nature introduced first into the Society's estates, there is every reason in the world to expect from it the most beneficial consequences, not only in a religious,

* The Spanish regulation here alluded to, is said to have taken place at the Havannah; and is as follows. As soon as a slave is landed, his name, price, &c. are entered in a public register; and the master is obliged by law to allow him one working day in every week to himself, besides Sunday; so that if he chooses to work for his master on that day, he receives the wages of a free-man for it; and whatever he gains by his labor on that day is so secured to him by law, that the master cannot deprive him of it. As soon as the slave is able to purchase another working day, the master is obliged to sell it to him at a proportionable price, viz. one fifth part of his original cost; and so likewise the remaining four days, at the same rate, as soon as the slave is able to redeem them: after which he is absolutely free.—See *Mr. Sharp's Appendix to the Just Limitation of Slavery.* &c. p. 53.

There is something wonderfully pleasing and benevolent in this institution. It were greatly to be wished that some expedient of this kind might be *tried* at least as an experiment, in some of the English islands. It is believed (on very just grounds, and after the maturest consideration of the subject) by men of great judgment and long experience in the managemen of West India estates, that if the Negroes on any of our plantations were emancipated *gradually* (for every improvement of their situation must be *very gradual*) in some such way as is here proposed, and retained afterwards by their owners as day-laborers at a certain fair stipulated price, it would be an alteration no less advantageous to the planter than kind and compassionate to the Negro.

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but even in a lucrative view. In the present situation indeed of those estates, it cannot well be attempted. The embarrassments in which, by a series of the most unfortunate incidents, they have for some time past been involved, have rendered it necessary for the Society to part with the management of them for a few years out of their own hands, which will render it unadviseable, and indeed impracticable, to establish for the present, in their full extent, the regulations now proposed. Yet still if any thing here suggested should seem to deserve the Society's attention, they may at least allow it to have some share in their deliberations; they may be forming, digesting, and arranging their future measures with a view to this great object, and be gradually preparing the way for the complete execution of them *at a proper time*; in which there can be no doubt but they will have the hearty concurrence and assistance of that worthy and benevolent member of the Society to whom they have for the present consigned their West Indian property.

With regard to our missionaries in North America, in what state they will remain after the great change which has so recently taken place on that continent, is as yet unknown; and therefore at present nothing more can with propriety be said concerning them than this; that the interests of the Church of England in America, will never be willingly abandoned by this Society; and that we shall ever retain, and, as far as we are able, give the most substantial proofs that we *do* entertain, a just and deep sense of the merits of those excellent persons among our missionaries, who, amidst the dangers and distresses of war, have preserved their fidelity unshaken, and through a long course of the severest trials have persevered uniformly and steadily in the discharge of their duty to their country, to the Society, and to the several congregations entrusted to their care.

But there is still another point which calls at present for some part of our attention; I mean the English Protestants in the province of Canada. They are

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now said to amount to several thousands, settled in different parts of the country, and at considerable distances from each other. For the instruction of all these there are no more than three Protestant clergymen, and those all foreigners, appointed and paid by government. There is not in the whole province a single English clergyman of our own communion, nor is there a single church belonging to the Protestants, they being obliged to make use of the Romish chapels.

Every one must be sensible that such a provision as this, for the support of public worship among our Protestant brethren in Canada, is exceedingly inadequate to their wants, and loudly calls for some addition and improvement. One should naturally hope that Government itself would, on a proper representation of the case, extend its protection and assistance to so many deserving subjects, and increase the establishment of Protestant ministers in proportion to the great increase of Protestant inhabitants; to which probably there will now be very considerable accessions from the other American provinces. In the mean while, this Society will perhaps think it necessary to pay some regard to those parts of Canada, where the English Protestants are most destitute of proper religious instruction, and most remote from all opportunities of joining in that mode of public worship which is conformable to their religious sentiments.

Every exertion, however, that the Society may think fit to make in these respects, will be perfectly consistent with that great and necessary work which has been recommended in this discourse. The proper period for carrying *the whole of it* into execution must undoubtedly, for the reasons already assigned, be at some distance; but the first steps towards it may certainly be taken without delay. We may, at least, enquire more exactly into the effects produced by the labors of our Catechist on our own Negroes. We may send, if it should appear necessary, fresh instructions to him, and may appoint missionaries to such of the plantations as are willing to receive them. From these be-

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ginnings we may advance by degrees towards the completion of our design, till our plantation become (what I trust it will one day be) a MODEL for all the West India islands to imitate: till it exhibit to the world a spectacle no less singular in its kind, than honorable to us and our religion, a little society of *truly Christian* Negroes, impressed with a just sense, and living in the habitual practice, of the several duties they owe to God, to their masters, to their fellow-laborers, and themselves; governed by *fixed laws*, and by the exactest discipline, yet tempered with gentleness and humanity; enjoying some little share of the comforts and advantages of social and domestic life; seeing their children educated in the principles of morality and religion; performing their daily task with alacrity and fidelity; looking up to their masters as their friends, their protectors, and benefactors; and consoling themselves for the loss of their liberty and their native land, by the care taken to "make their yoke easy and their "burden light," to civilize their manners, to enlarge their understandings, to reform their hearts, and to open to them a prospect into a better and happier country, where all tears shall be wiped from their eyes, and where sorrow and *slavery* shall be no more.

A scene such as this, which is far, I am persuaded, from being a visionary idea, would be delightful to humanity; would form A NEW SCHOOL FOR PIETY AND VIRTUE IN THE WESTERN WORLD, a seminary of religion for all the slaves of the neighboring plantations and islands, perhaps ultimately for the whole coast of Africa; would be an example of decency, of order, of harmony, of industry, of happiness, which the other planters would find it impossible to resist; and would more effectually confute the various objections that have been made to the conversion of the African slaves, than all the speculative arguments in the world*.

* Every thing here proposed, with respect to the Negroes belonging to the Society's estate in Barbadoes, might be effected without difficulty, if a missionary *well qualified* for the business was sent there, with a good appointment, for the *sole purpose* of instructing the slaves in the principles of morality and religion.

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And let us not be deterred from this noble undertaking by the apprehension of that additional expense in which it may involve us. The demands upon us from other quarters, where we have formerly expended considerable sums, will probably be continually growing less and less; the expenses incurred on account of our West Indian estates are now in a train of being gradually repaid, and even the savings from the missions now vacant in America (should it be found impracticable or unadviseable to re-establish them) would be more that sufficient to answer all the purposes of the proposed undertaking. But should it even require more than our revenues can supply, we need be under no apprehension of wanting proper support. When once it is known that the civilization and the conversion of the Negro-slaves is to be hereafter one of the grand leading objects of our pious labors, and a proper and practicable plan for that purpose is laid before

And that a *general* conversion of the Negroes to Christianity is no visionary or romantic project, but perfectly practicable, and that it would be in the highest degree beneficial, both to the Negroes themselves and to their proprietors, by improving their morals, and promoting their increase, by rendering them more content with their situations, more diligent in their labors, more attached to their masters, is evident from the report made on the subject to the committee of privy council (which sat in the year 1788 to examine evidence on the slave-trade, and at which I constantly assisted) by the governors and legislators of almost all our West India islands. And it is further confirmed beyond a doubt, by *actual experience*, by the astonishing success which has attended the labors of the Moravian missionaries in the Danish islands of St. Thomas, St. Croix, and St. John, and more particularly in the island of Antigua, where there are now near 10,000 Negroes, under their direction, who are not only baptized but carefully instructed in the doctrines and duties of revealed religion, and are not merely nominal but real Christians. And so much do their converts exceed all the unconverted slaves in sobriety, industry, honesty, fidelity, and obedience to their masters, that all the planters in that island are anxious to have their Negroes placed under their care. A very satisfactory statement of these important and decisive facts may be found in a paper sent from Antigua, and inserted in the very valuable report of the committee of privy council abovementioned.

In the speech made by Mr. Charles Ellis in the house of Commons, on his moving for a gradual termination of the slave-trade, in the year 1797, that gentleman strongly recommends a general plan for the instruction of the Negro slaves in the principles of morality and religion; and in consequence of his motion being adopted by the house, directions were actually sent by the Secretary of State to the governors of the West India islands, to promote in the most effectual manner the moral and religious instruction of the Negroes. But I have not yet heard that any effectual measures have hitherto been taken for that purpose. March 10, 1803.

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the public, every heart, every hand, will be open on the occasion; and there cannot be a doubt but that the increase of our benefactions and subscriptions will soon gratify our most sanguine wishes. It is impossible that the generosity, the humanity, I will add, the justice of the English nation, can suffer *near half a million* of their fellow-creatures to continue in the most deplorable state of heathenism, irreligion, and vice, without giving the Society every assistance that may be necessary to extricate them out of it. It would be glorious to Great Britain to take the lead in this benevolent and truly Christian enterprize. And allow me to add, that it is peculiarly incumbent on the people of this kingdom to exert their utmost liberality in alleviating the miseries, both temporal and spiritual, of the wretched Africans; since they have been for many years (till interrupted by the late war) more largely concerned in that inhuman merchandize of men, and have imported more slaves into the colonies, than any other nation in Europe. By their means principally have many thousands, many millions, of human creatures been torn from their native land, from every blessing that was valuable, every connection that was dear to them; and, after passing in their voyage through incredible hardships and difficulties, (under which great numbers of them actually perish*) have been landed in a country and among a people unknown to them; and, without any offence or fault of theirs, have been doomed to a perpetual servitude, a servitude too which they leave (the only inheritance they *have* to leave) entailed on their latest posterity†.

* In the passage, and in what is called *the seasoning* in the islands, one-third of the new-imported Negroes is sometimes lost. *Long's Hist. of Jamaica*, vol. ii. p. 434. and *Benezet's Caution*, &c. p. 40. In a late trial at Guildhall it appeared, that a ship freighted with slaves, being reduced to a great scarcity of water, 133 *Negroes were hand-cuffed, and thrown into the sea!*

† In the year 1768, the number of slaves bought on the coast of Africa was 104,100. Of these 53,100 were bought by British merchants. The constant annual importation, and of course *the annual consumption*, of Negroes in America and the West Indies, is supposed to have been of late years, on an average, about 60,000. The Abbe Raynal states the total importation from Africa, since the first beginning of the slave-trade, *nine mil-*

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Let then our countrymen make haste to relieve, as far as they are able, the calamities they have brought on so large a part of the human race; let them endeavor to wipe away the reproach of having delivered over so many of their innocent fellow-creatures to a most heavy temporal bondage, both by contributing to soothe and alleviate that as much as possible, and by endeavoring to rescue them from the still more cruel bondage of ignorance and sin. Let them, in short, concur, with the generous efforts of the Society "to "heal the *broken-hearted*, to preach deliverance to the "*captives*, and recovery of sight to the *blind*, to set at "liberty them that are *bruised*, to preach the accepta-"ble year of the Lord."

APPENDIX TO SERMON XVII.

THAT the slave-trade to the coast of Africa might without any material injury to our islands be abolished by one of the methods mentioned in the last note to the preceding sermon p. 222, has been repeatedly, and I think very satisfactorily proved. The attempts, however, that have been made to carry into effect any mode of abolition, have for the present failed, and the question is now probably at rest for many years. But although the main object of this great and memorable contest has been unfortunately lost, and the efforts of those truly great men, who to their immortal honor contended for the extinction of this odious traffic, have not been attended with that complete success which might have been expected from the justice of their cause, the weight of their arguments, the splendor of

lions of slaves. Hist. Phil. vol. iv. p. 154. Surely it deserves consideration *again and again*, whether this cruel havock might not be prevented, *without any injury to the islands*, by some one of the methods above suggested; either by trying to cultivate the sugar-cane by enfranchised blacks, or by the abolition of the slave-trade, at a certain distant period, or by giving such encouragement to the population of the Negroes in our islands, as might render their increase equal to the demand of the plantations, and preclude the necessity of any further importation from Africa.

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their talents, and the unrivalled power of their eloquence, yet still many important advantages have incidentally arisen from the agitation of the question, and the cause of humanity has upon the whole been a considerable gainer by the conflict.

In the first place, many excellent regulations have been made respecting the vessels in which the negroes are conveyed from Africa to the West Indies, and the mode of treating them during their voyage; which have contributed most essentially to the preservation of their lives, and to the alleviation of the extreme misery they formerly endured in passing from one country to the other.

2. Since the discussion of this question, the condition of the negro slaves in the British West India islands, has been considerably ameliorated. A much greater degree of lenity and gentleness has been exercised towards them, by the greater part of the West India proprietors, than is said to have generally prevailed in the islands twenty years ago. Their ease and comfort have in several instances been very humanely consulted, and some very salutary laws have been enacted for their protection, and security, especially in the Islands of Jamaica, and Grenada.

3. Another most important advantage, resulting from this contest, is that in the course of it, the nature of the slave-trade to the coast of Africa, has been fully laid open to the world; all its horrors have been dragged forth to public view, and the grand point in dispute, on which the controversy chiefly turned, and the truth of which was for a long time most strenuously denied by the opposers of the abolition, I mean the injustice, the inhumanity, and the immorality of that trade, has been at length given up, even by several of the West India proprietors themselves, and those too of the most respectable characters and talents.

I appeal in the first place, to the full, explicit, and honorable confession of the late Mr. Bryan Edwards (the celebrated historian of the West Indies, and an enemy to the abolition of the slave-trade) in his speech

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delivered at a free conference between the council and assembly of the island of Jamaica, on the 19th of November, 1789. The passage I allude to is as follows.

"I am persuaded that Mr. Wilberforce, has been very rightly informed, as to the manner in which slaves are generally procured. The intelligence I have collected from my own negroes abundantly confirm Mr. Wilberforce's account; and I have not the smallest doubt that in Africa the effects of this trade are precisely such as he represents them to be. Sir, the whole or greatest part of that immense continent is a field of warfare, and desolation; a wilderness in which the inhabitants are wolves toward each other. That this scene of oppression, fraud treachery, and blood, if not originally occasioned, is in part (I will not say wholly) upheld by the slave-trade, I dare not dispute. Every man in the sugar islands may be convinced that it is so, who will inquire of any African negroes, on their first arrival, concerning the circumstances of their captivity. The assertion that a great many of them are criminals and convicts, is a mockery and insult; nor can any thing be more fallacious than a comparative reference to the number of felons transported annually from England." *Mr. Edward's speech at a Free Conference, &c.*——p. 10.

In the next place, I appeal to the motion made by Mr. Charles Ellis, in the house of commons, April 6, 1797, for adopting such measures as might gradually diminish the necessity of the slave-trade, and ultimately lead to its complete termination; which motion (as we are informed by one of the speakers in that debate) was, much to their honor, made at the general and almost unanimous desire of the whole West Indian body in the house of commons, after many and deep consultations*.

In the debate on this motion, Mr. Ellis candidly confesses that the slave-trade could not be considered in any other light, than as a *necessary evil*†; and that if the questions were changed to a deliberation, wheth-

* Mr. Barham's speech.——p. 56. † Mr. Ellis's speech.——p. 38.

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er a system should or should not now be established, which must depend for its future existence on a trade in slaves, the discussion might then be confined to the *merits* of such a trade; and arguing simply on that principle, it would be impossible for any man of *common humanity*, to hesitate in foregoing whatever advantages might be expected from such a system*.

It appears then from this speech of Mr. Ellis, and still more from that of Mr. Edwards, that the *merits* of the trade are completely abandoned, and the propriety of putting a termination to it admitted. The question is therefore, now brought into a very narrow compass, and reduced to this single point; what is the best and safest and most effectual mode of removing this dreadful scourge of so large a part of the human race. This will be the sole subject of consideration, if ever this great question shall be again resumed; and when all the ability and wisdom of the two houses of parliament are directed to this single point now at issue, we may reasonably flatter ourselves that the decision of it will not meet with much difficulty or much delay.

* Mr. Ellis's speech, p. 2.

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SERMON XVIII.

JOHN xiii. 23.

Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved.

THE person here described, is St. John the Evangelist, the author of that Gospel which bears his name, and from which the text is taken. It was he who enjoyed the honorable distinction of being placed next to his divine Master, and of leaning on his bosom at supper. He was, moreover, always one of those whom our Lord admitted to his most confidential conversations and most interesting transactions, especially in the last awful and affecting scenes of his life; and he is scarce ever mentioned by any other name than that of THE DISCIPLE WHOM JESUS LOVED*. These circumstances plainly mark the favorite and the friend: and, on the other hand, if we advert a little to the conduct of St. John towards our Lord during the course of his sufferings, the very time when true friendship would be most apt to show itself, we shall discover in it plain indications of a strong and tender affection.

When our Saviour was betrayed by Judas, and apprehended by the Jews, though St. John had at first, with all the other disciples, forsaken him and fled; yet his affection soon got the better of his fears, and prompted him to follow his Lord, at the utmost hazard of his own life, into the palace of the high-priest†.

* John xiii. 23; xix. 26; xx. 2; xxi. 7. 20.

† See Le Clerc, Doddridge, and other commentators on John xviii. 15, 16.

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St. Peter did the same, but in a very short time afterwards, exhibited a melancholy instance of human infirmity, and notwithstanding the most vehement and passionate professions of inviolable attachment to Jesus, he denied him three times with execrations and oaths. St. John's way of manifesting his sincerity was not by words, but by deeds. He faithfully adhered to his divne Master in the very midst of his enemies, and with fond anxiety pursued him through all the various events of this distressful period of his life.—After Jesus was condemned and hung upon the cross, casting his eyes down from that dreadful eminence, he saw among the crowd "the disciple whom he loved "standing by*." It does not appear from the history that there were any other of the Apostles that attended him in this last melancholy scene except St. John.—They were terrified, it should seem, with the danger of openly espousing him at so critical a time. But, unawed by any such apprehensions, which all gave way to the ardor of his friendship, and the extremity of his grief, our evangelist placed himself as near as he could to the cross, to catch the dying looks, and to wait the last commands of his Lord and friend. Those commands were soon given him, in the most affecting terms; and the trust then reposed in him was of such a nature as plainly showed what unbounded confidence his dying Master placed in his fidelity and affection. For our Lord observing several women, and among them his mother, standing near his cross, fixed in grief, horror, and amazement, at that dreadful spectacle, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold thy son!" then, turning towards St. John, "Behold thy moth-"er†!" Words few and simple, but full of meaning, expressive of a thousand tender sentiments, both towards the distressed parent whom he left behind him, and the friend to whose care so sacred a pledge was committed. St. John instantly saw the meaning, and felt the force of this moving bequest. He considered our Lord's mother as his own, and from that hour (as

* John xix. 26. † John xix. 26, 27.

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he himself with his usual modesty and simplicity tells us) "he took her to his own home*."

Nor did his affection for his departed friend terminate here. It was continued after his crucifixion, to his memory, his character, and his religion. After a long life spent in teaching and suffering for that religion, he concluded it with a work of infinite utility, the revisal of the three Gospels already written, and the addition of his own to supply what they had omitted. With this view principally he gives us several of our Saviour's discourses with his disciples, which are no where else to be met with; and it is very observable, that these, as well as the many other occurrences of his life, which he introduces as supplemental to the other Evangelists, are such as set his beloved master in the most amiable and graceful point of view, such as a favorite disciple would be most likely to select, and most disposed to enlarge upon. Of this kind, for instance, are our Saviour's discourse with the woman of Samaria; the cure of the infirm man at the pool of Bethesday; the acquittal of the woman taken in adultery; the description of the good shepherd and his sheep; the affecting history of Lazarus; the condescending and expressive act of washing his disciples' feet; his inimitably tender and consolatory discourse to them just before his suffering; his most admirable prayer on the same occasion; and his pathetic recommendation of his sheep to St. Peter after his resurrection. These passages are to be found only in St. John's Gospel, and whoever reads them with attention will discover in them plain indications not only of a heaven-directed hand, but of a feeling and a grateful heart, smitten with the love of a departed friend, penetrated with a sense of his distinguished kindness, perfectly well informed and thoroughly interested, in every tender scene that it describes, soothing itself with the recollection of little domestic incidents and familiar conversations, and tracing out not only the larger and more obvious features of the favorite character, but

* John xix. 26, 27.

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even those finer and more delicate strokes in it, which would have eluded a less observing eye, or less faithful memory, than those of a beloved companion and friend.

From this short detail it appears, that there subsisted between our Saviour and St. John a real, sincere, and tender friendship: and this fact being established, will furnish us with some remarks, of no small importance to religion and to ourselves.

The first is, that friendship is perfectly consistent with the spirit of the Gospel, and the practice of every duty that it requires at our hands. Who, indeed, but must grieve if it was not? Who but would grieve to find, that, in order to arrive at happiness in the next world, it is necessary to renounce one of the greatest blessings that can be possessed in this? For although, indeed, both the merits and the pleasures of friendship have been sometimes, by ancient as well as modern writers, most extravagantly and injudiciously magnified; yet, after all, it must be allowed, that when it is formed on right principles, and conducted with sobriety and good sense, there is something in it so soothing, so congenial to the human mind; it is what the very best of men have been always so strongly disposed to cultivate and cherish; it so improves every enjoyment, and so lightens every misfortune; it is associated generally with so many excellent qualities; it gives birth to so many generous sentiments, so many noble and disinterested actions; it is, in short, though not a virtue, yet something so *very like* a virtue, that no one, who has ever tasted the genuine satisfaction it affords, can willingly consent to part with it. He cannot easily be brought to believe that a religion, which not only allows but improves and exalts every innocent and rational enjoyment, should in this single instance assume a tone of rigor quite foreign to its natural temper, and preclude us from one of the sweetest consolations that has ever yet been found out for the various afflictions of life. And in fact there is no need for any such apprehensions. The example of our Lord himself is

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alone sufficient to satisfy us on this head. If *He* had his beloved companion and friend, we cannot surely be acting contrary to his sentiments, if we also have ours.

But whence then, it is said, that remarkable *silence* of the Gospel on this subject? How comes it to pass, that on the article of friendship, which has so much exercised the eloquence of Pagan writers, not one syllable is to be found in the whole New Testament, not one precept or direction, not even the smallest degree of commendation bestowed upon it? The answer is obvious. To have made friendship a necessary part of Christian obedience, would have been preposterous and absurd. For that similarity of disposition, and coincidence of sentiment and affection, on which friendship is founded, do not depend solely on our own choice, are not under the direction of our own will; and therefore could not possibly be the proper objects of a divine command. Nor would it have been prudent to have expressed in the Gospel any particular approbation of this connection. It might have inflamed that propensity to it which nature had already made sufficiently strong, and which the injudicious encomiums of heathen moralists had raised to a romantic and a dangerous height. Our divine lawgiver showed his wisdom equally in what he enjoined, and what he left unnoticed. He knew exactly, what no Pagan philosopher ever knew, where to be silent and where to speak. It was not his intention, it was indeed far below his dignity, to say fine things upon popular subjects; pleasing perhaps to a few, but utterly useless to the bulk of mankind. *His* object was of a much more important and extensive nature: to inculcate the plain, humble, practical duties of piety and morality; the duties that were of universal concern and indispensible obligation, such as were essentially necessary to our well-being in this life, and our everlasting happiness in the next. Now the warmest admirers of friendship cannot pretend to raise it into *a duty*, much less into a duty of this high rank. It is a delightful, it is an ami-

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able, it is often a laudable attachment; but it is not a necessary requisite either to the present welfare or the future salvation of mankind in general, and consequently is not of sufficient importance to deserve a distinct place in the Christian system. The utmost that could be done there was to show (and it was sufficiently shown by the example of our Lord) that a virtuous friendship does not militate against the *spirit* of his religion; but is, on the contrary, as we shall see presently, improved and exalted by its precepts, and finds in them its best foundation and its firmest support.

From the mere *silence* then of the Gospel on this subject, no inference can be justly drawn against the lawfulness of friendship. But it is urged further (and it is a circumstance which seems to have had much weight with some very ingenious defenders of Revelation*) that it was one great object of the Christian religion to introduce into the world a temper of universal benevolence and good-will; and with that view its business was, not to *contract*, but to *expand* our affections as much as possible; to throw down all the little mean fences and partitions, within which the human heart is too apt to intrench itself, and lay it open to nobler views, and a larger and more liberal sphere of action. Hence it is imagined, that friendship must necessarily be inconsistent with the genius of that religion, because it lavishes on one object all that kindness and affection which ought to be diffused among the whole human race. And, indeed, if friendship would be content with nothing less than the surrender of our whole stock of benevolence, without the least reserve for the rest of our fellow creatures, it might well be deemed a monopoly altogether incompatible with that free and general commerce of good offices, which the Gospel certainly meant to extend to every quarter of the globe. But this surely is far from being a true state of the case. We may discharge every tender office that friendship can demand, without neglecting any of those social duties which Revelation enjoins.

* Particularly the late Mr. Soame Jenyns.

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There are various gradations of affection, corresponding to the various relations of life, all in perfect concord one with another, and contributing each their respective parts towards the composition of that harmony which ought to reign throughout the whole. Connubial tenderness, filial affection, fraternal fondness, parental love, all these are *partial* attachments, no less than friendship, yet these most certainly the Gospel does not forbid. Why then should friendship be thought less reconcileable than these with the temper of our religion? The truth is, the design of Christianity was not to *extinguish*, but to *regulate* only, and reduce to their proper dimensions, all our private and personal connections. Within the wide circumference of Christian charity, it allows us to form as many smaller circles of benevolence as we please. It requires only that our affections should move in them under the control of that sovereign law of UNIVERSAL LOVE, which, like the great principle of ATTRACTION in the material world, is diffused throughout our moral system, to guide, direct, and regulate the whole, and to restrain within proper limits every subordinate sentiment and inferior movement of the soul. Under these restrictions, so far is Christianity from being *adverse* to any virtuous connections, that it actually provides a remedy for the greatest imperfection under which they labor. It does, what in the fond hour of affection has been often wished, but, till the Gospel appeared, wished in vain; it renders our friendships *immortal*. It revives that union which death seems to dissolve; it restores us again to those whom we most dearly loved, in that blessed society of "just men "made perfect," which is to form, probably, one great part of our felicity in heaven.

II. But secondly; the example of our Lord, in selecting one beloved disciple, does not only give his sanction to friendship, but it teaches us also what *sort* of friendship it is that he allows and authorizes. For, whatever those qualities were which attracted his notice, and conciliated his affection, in the person of St.

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John, these, we may be sure, are the proper constituents of a legitimate, a Christian friendship. Now it does not appear that St. John was distinguished by any of those showy intellectual accomplishments which are of all others most apt to strike our fancy and captivate our hearts, although, in fact, they are often much better calculated for the amusement of a convivial hour, than for that constant fund of comfort and satisfaction through life, which we naturally expect from a well-formed friendship. That which principally attracts our notice, in his writings, and in his conduct, is a simplicity and singleness of heart, a fervent piety, an unbounded benevolence, an unaffected modesty, humility, meekness, and gentleness of disposition. These are evidently the great characteristic virtues that took the lead in his soul, and break forth in every page of his Gospel and his Epistles. These then are the qualities we ought principally to regard in the choice of our friends, and to cultivate in ourselves, if we would conciliate and preserve their affections. Now it is very observable, that these qualities are the very virtues which are properly styled *evangelical*, which the Christian revelation more particularly recommends, and which distinguish it from all other religions that ever appeared in the world. A friendship, therefore, founded on these principles, is, strictly and properly speaking, *a Christian friendship*, and it will be the direct opposite of those celebrated instances of Pagan friendship, of which we hear so much in ancient story. The characteristics of these commonly were, a haughty and overbearing spirit; a vindictive, implacable, and impetuous temper; an intrepidity superior to every danger, and every consideration of justice, honesty, and humanity, in behalf of those partners in their iniquity whom they chuse to call their friends. Such wild extravagancies as these, as well as those confederacies in vice, which young men, even now sometimes compliment with the name of friendship, are indeed diametrically opposite to the genius of Christianity. But it would be as unfair to take our ideas of

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friendship from these corrupt perversions of it, as to form our notions of liberty from the excesses of a lawless rabble, or our sentiments of religion from the ravings of a delirious enthusiast. To know what friendship really is, we must look for it in that sacred repository of every thing great and excellent, the Gospel of Christ. We shall there not only see it actually existing in its utmost perfection in the person of Christ and his beloved disciple; but we shall find that almost all the virtues on which his religion lays the greatest stress, have a natural tendency to generate it in our souls. Examine only the several branches of benevolence, as they lie in the sacred writings, and especially in that exquisite picture of charity which is drawn by the masterly hand of St. Paul*, and you will perceive that nothing is more easy than to graft upon them a firm and lasting friendship. They contain all the right principles and rudiments of that delightful sentiment; and these being once fairly laid before the world, every man was left (as it was fit he should be) to make the application of them himself, at his own discretion, to the purposes of friendly union, according as inclination led, or opportunity invited him. There can want nothing more than the concurrence of two congenial minds, to kindle these sparks of friendship, into a flame, much purer, I apprehend and brighter, and more permanent, than ever glowed within the breast of a heathen.

From the whole then of this inquiry, it appears, that whoever cultivates the duties prescribed by the Gospel, will be of all others the best qualified for a virtuous friendship. But what is of far more consequence to the world in general, he will also be the best qualified to live happily without it. Friendship is a blessing, which like many others in this world, falls to the lot of few. It depends so much on constitution, on accident, on a concurrence of circumstances which so rarely meet, and which no one can command, that by far the greater part of mankind pass through the world, and

* 1 Cor. xiii.

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pass through it very comfortably too, without ever having the good fortune to find that person whom they can with strict propriety call a *friend.* Had then the Gospel given ever so many precepts or directions on the subject of friendship; to a few refined philosophic minds they might perhaps have been of some use. But it was not for these only, it was for the *multitude* also, for the people at large, that the Gospel was designed. And to these it must be no small satisfaction to find, that a connection which they often want the inclination, and oftener still the power, to form, is not enjoined, is not recommended, is not even mentioned, in the Gospel, and that they may go to heaven extremely well without it. A faithful friend is indeed, as the son of Sirach no less justly than elegantly expresses it, *the medicine of life**. And happy they are who find it. But to those who do not, or by any fatal accident are deprived of it, Christianity has other medicines, other consolations in store. It has pleasures to bestow, which will amply countervail those of the sincerest and firmest friendship. It gives that peace of mind, which nothing in this world, not even friendship itself can give. It secures to us the favor of that Being, who is able to be our friend indeed. Our earthly friends may deceive, may desert us, may be separated from us, may be converted into our bitterest enemies. But our heavenly friend has declared (and he is one that may be trusted) that if we adhere faithfully to him, he will never leave us nor forsake us†. It is, in short, in every man's power to be, if he pleases, though not precisely in the same sense that St. John was, yet in a very important sense, *the friend of Christ.* We have our Saviour's own word for it. "Ye are my "friends," says he to his disciples, "If ye do what-"soever I command you‡." Nay, he has assured us that he will consider every real Christian as united to him by still closer ties. This assurance is given us in one of those noble strains of divine eloquence which are so common in the sacred writings. Our

* Eccles. xi. 16. † Heb. xiii. 5. ‡ John xv. 14.

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Lord being told that his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him, he gives a turn to this little incident, perfectly new, and inexpressibly tender and affectionate. "Who is my mother?" says he, "and who are my brethren? And he stretched "forth his hand towards his disciples, and said, Behold "my mother, and my brethren. For whosoever shall "do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the "same is my brother, and sister, and mother*."

* Matth. xii. 46—50.

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SERMON XIX.

PHILIPPIANS iv. 4.

Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice.

AMONG the many expedients put in practice by the enemies of our Religion, to obstruct its progress, and to counteract its influence, it is no uncommon one, to set before the eyes of mankind a most frightful picture of Christianity, and to represent it as a stern, austere, uncomfortable, gloomy religion, adverse to all the innocent enjoyments of life, and to all the natural desires and propensities of the human mind. As a proof of this, we are referred to those injunctions of mortification and self-denial, of penitence, contrition, and remorse, of abstinence from pleasure and enmity to the world, which occur sometimes in the sacred writings; and to those seasons, which in conformity to the spirit of such injunctions, have, by the authority of particular churches, been set apart for the purposes of retirement and abstinence, recollection and devotion. That precepts of this import are to be found in the Gospel, and that they carry with them some appearance of rigor, we do not deny. But it requires only a very small share of discernment to perceive, and of candor to acknowledge, that this is nothing *more* than appearance. It is very true, it is not to be dissembled; the Gospel does most certainly require us to renounce some things, which the man of the world may not be very willing to part with. But what are these things? They are those lusts which war against the soul: they are those selfish desires, which

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contract, and narrow, and harden the heart: they are those hateful and turbulent passions, which fill the mind with disquiet, and the world with disorder; they are those predominant vices and follies, those dangerous and destructive amusements, which destroy all composure of mind, all purity of sentiment and dignity of conduct, and plunge us in expense, dissipation, and ruin. These are the things which we are required to mortify, to deny, to subdue, to repent of, to renounce; and if these are the hardships complained of, to these indeed we must submit. But to accuse the Gospel of severity on this account, would be just as rational and as equitable as to charge the surgeon with cruelty for amputating a gangrened limb, or the physician with ill-nature for prescribing a strict regimen and a course of searching medicines to a patient bloated with disease. We have reason on the contrary to bless the skilful hand, that, by any operations, however painful, by any remedies, however unpalatable, condescends to preserve or to restore the health of the soul. The truth is, the very cruelties of Christianity (if they may be called so) are tender mercies. Far from inspiring gloom and melancholy, or rendering our existence uncomfortable, they are, in fact, the only solid foundation of true cheerfulness. Of all men living, those are the most wretched and comfortless, who are the slaves of their passions. Slavery of every kind, and this above all others, has a natural tendency to debase and degrade the soul, and to render it abject, mean, and spiritless. And till (as the Gospel requires) we have resolutely emancipated ourselves from this wretched state of spiritual servitude, we must never hope for any lasting peace or tranquillity of mind. Cheerfulness is the privilege of innocence and virtue. The vicious and impenitent have no pretensions to it. They may, indeed, have transient gleams of gaiety and mirth: but these are far different from that calm, serene, and constant sunshine, which religious cheerfulness sheds over the soul. The sorrows of repentance may somtimes cast a temporary shade around it; but it soon breaks

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out again with redoubled splendor. "Heaviness may "endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." The struggle with our depraved appetites may, perhaps, for a time, be painful enough; but if we quit ourselves like men, it will soon be decided in our favor; and then all our difficulties are at an end. From that moment, "the ways of Religion are ways of pleasant- "ness and all her paths are peace." Christianity excludes us from no rational, no harmless enjoyment. It does not spread before us a delicious banquet, and then come with a "touch not, taste not, handle not." All it requires is, that our festivity degenerate not into intemperance; our amusements into dissipation; our freedom into licentiousness. Though it bids us "not "to love the world" extravagantly, nor "to conform "to it" criminally, yet it no where enjoins us to flee from it; but rather after the example of our blessed Lord, to live in it, and to overcome it. A sullen, solitary, indolent retirement, is far from being conformable to the true spirit and temper of our religion, which is active, lively, and animated throughout. Consider its precepts, consider the example of those who taught it, and you will find that the predominant quality in both is an UNIFORM, UNREMITTED, CHEERFULNESS. John the Baptist, it is true, the precursor, and herald of the Gospel, assumed the appearance of austerity and rigor. He came, "neither eating nor drinking. "He lived in the wilderness, had his raiment of cam- "els hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins, and his "meat was locusts and wild honey." A very proper demeanor this for him, whose province it was to prepare the minds of men for the Gospel, by repentance and self-denial, to till and dress the soil, to kill in it every rank and noxious weed, to render it clean and pure, and moist with the tears of contrition, fit for the reception of that good seed which his illustrious follower was in a short time coming to sow in it. When HE appeared, the scene was changed. The Saviour of the world came (as he himself is pleased to express it) "eating and drinking." He came with all the

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marks of good-humor and good-will to men. He went to marriage feasts. The very first miracle he worked was, to promote their cheerfulness: and he mingled in those happy meetings with so much ease and freedom, with so little affectation of moroseness or reserve, that his enemies gave him the name (a name which he treated with the most sovereign contempt) "of a gluttonous man, and a wine-bibber, a friend of "publicans and sinners*." Every mark of respect and attention that was shown him, he accepted with the most engaging and graceful condescension; nor did he even disdain the rich perfume, which the liberal hand of Mary poured upon him, notwithstanding the ill-timed murmurs of his more fastidious followers. Although he himself, by his own example, plainly countenanced the practice of fasting at proper times, and under proper restrictions, yet he would not suffer his disciples to fast while he was with them. The time would come, he told them, when they would have abundant occasion to fast. But when the bridegroom was with them, they ought to know nothing but joy; and that joy should not be interrupted by unseasonable severities and anticipated sorrows. He reproved the hypocritical Pharisees for the ostentatious sadness of their countenances on such occasions; and enjoined his own followers, whenever they *did* practise an extraordinary abstemiousness, to preserve even in the midst of their humiliations, their wonted neatness of attire and cheerfulness of appearance. "The hypo-"crites," says he, "disfigure their faces, that they "may appear unto men to fast: but thou, when thou "fastest, anoint thine head and wash thy face: that "thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Fa-"ther which is in secret: and thy Father which seeth "in secret, shall reward thee openly†." His discourses were of a piece with his deportment: they were soothing, comfortable, refreshing. The form of words, which he made use of generally when he cured diseases, was, "Son be of good cheer, thy sins be

* Matth. xi. 19. † Matth. vi. 16, 17.

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"forgiven thee." He was constantly endeavoring to support the drooping spirits of his disciples by the most encourageing expressions; and when he found himself at length obliged to explain to them the hardships they were to undergo for his sake, the conclusion was, "In "the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good "cheer; I have overcome the world*."

The same spirit diffused itself to the apostles, evangelists, and disciples, who maintained, throughout the whole course of their ministry, a certain vigor and vivacity of mind, which no calamity could depress. Their writings are full of exhortations "to rejoice "evermore; to show mercy with cheerfulness; to "count it all joy, even when we fall into temptation." The language of the text, the language of the whole Gospel, is, "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I "say, Rejoice." Hence it is plain, that a constant cheerfulness is the distinguishing character of the Christian religion: that it animated both the precepts and the conduct of those who taught it, and was considered by them as a necessary concomitant in the performance of every part of our duty.

But the Gospel does not stop here. It not only *commands* us to be cheerful; this it might very easily do; but what is of still more importance, it assists us in becoming so; it affords the best and most effectual helps toward obtaining that happy and satisfied temper, that constant serenity and composure of mind, without which all the wealth and grandeur of the world are insipid and worthless things.

I. The first assistance of this kind it gives us is, that constant and enlivening employment which it finds for our thoughts. The human mind, we all know, is restless and active; and if not otherwise engaged, will turn its activity inward, will prey upon and devour itself, and become the destroyer of its own happiness. A very large proportion of the evils which press the heaviest upon us, are purely imaginary, are the creation of our own hands, and arise from no other cause than

* John xvi. 33.

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the having nothing else to do, but to sit down and make ourselves as miserable as we possibly can. One great means, therefore, of promoting cheerfulness is, to keep our thoughts constantly and usefully employed. The pursuit of any important and worthy object is in itself enlivening. Every advance we make in it, is a new accession of pleasure; we feel ourselves animated with a growing delight; and go on with increasing ardor and alacrity to the attainment of the end we have in view. A succession of worldly pleasures and occupations may, for a time, engage our attention; but that delusion is soon over, and they leave a void behind which nothing can fill up, but those great and noble purposes of action which the Gospel presents to our minds: the conquest of our passions; the improvement of our nature; the exaltation of our affections; the diffusion of happiness to every human being within our reach; the attainment of God's favor and protection here, and of everlasting glory and happiness hereafter. These are objects worthy of a rational and immortal being; these will find ample employment for all the faculties and powers of his mind; and the higher his rank and abilities are, the more will his duties multiply upon him, and the sphere of his activity enlarge itself. Whoever, in short, engages in earnest in the Christian warfare, whoever presses on with zeal and ardor towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, and "forgetting those "things that are behind, reaches forth to those that "are before," will never find either his attention or his spirits droop. He will be continually animated with new prospects, elated with new acquisitions, rewarded with new triumphs, and will know nothing of that langour and flatness, that gloom and melancholy, which are so apt to seize upon unoccupied minds.

II. Whoever suffers himself to be brought under the dominion of any malignant passion, envy, malice, hatred jealousy, or revenge, must from that moment, bid adieu to peace and cheerfulness. These odious tyrants are all most fatal enemies to our repose. They throw the

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mind into a perpetual ferment and agitation; they harass it with a succession of malevolent sentiments and vindictive designs; they keep it in a constant fever of resentment, and allow it no rest. The man possessed by these wicked spirits "sleeps not, except he has "done mischief: his sleep is taken away, unless he "cause some to fall*." Every one must see, that a state of mind like this must exclude all enjoyment of life; must produce a sullen gloominess of disposition, which no ray of cheerfulness can penetrate or enliven.

When, therefore, Christianity exhorts us to put away "all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, evil-speaking, and malice," it prescribes one most effectual remedy against disquietude and dejection of mind. And when it further recommends, in the room of these passions, to substitute sentiments of mercy, kindness, meekness, gentleness, compassion, brotherly affection, charity; when it commands us to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick, and pour oil into the wounds of the afflicted and distressed, it points out to us the most effectual means, not only to make others happy, but ourselves also.

In fact, true Christian charity, in all its extent, is a never-failing fund of pleasure to the soul. The joy resulting from the diffusion of blessings to all around us, is the purest and sublimest that can enter the human mind, and can be conceived only by those who have experienced it. Next to the consolations of divine grace, it is the most sovereign balm to the miseries of life, both in him who is the object of it, and in him who exercises it; and it will not only soothe and tranquillize a troubled spirit, but inspire a constant flow of good humor, content, and gaiety of heart.

III. Another source of cheerfulness to be found in the Gospel is, that most comfortable doctrine of a particular Providence, which is there set forth in the clearest and most unequivocal terms. It is impossible for any thinking man, who supposes that the world, and all its affairs, are under no other direction than that of

* Proverbs iv. 16.

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chance and fortune, to enjoy any true and permanent tranquillity of mind. There is such a variety of miseries to which human nature is continually exposed, and which no human prudence can either foresee or avert, that, without a firm confidence in some powerful superintendent, who is both able and willing to protect us, we must live under perpetual apprehensions for ourselves and those who are most dear to us. From this most painful solicitude (which was in fact, a source of endless uneasiness to the Pagan world) the Gospel effectually relieves us. It informs us, that we are under the constant guardianship of an Almighty Friend and Protector, who sees the very minutest events, and governs the most casual; who, in the immense range of creation, does not overlook the least or meanest of his creatures; who commands us, "to take no thought "for the morrow," but to cast all our care upon him, for this most substantial and satisfactory reason, "be- "cause he careth for us;" who has declared, that, "if we seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, "all those things (that are really necessary) shall be "added to us;" and that, in the great variety and seemingly discordant mixture of human events, "he "will make every thing work together (ultimately) "for good to them that love him*." Here, now, is a firm and adequate foundation for enjoyment of the present moment, and indifference about the next. Under the persuasion that no disaster can reach us without his permission, who watches over us with an eye that never slumbers, and a tenderness which nothing but guilt can withdraw from us, we can face those unknown terrors from which Pagan Philosophy turned away dismayed; can look forward, unmoved, into futurity, and contemplate all the possible contingencies that may befal us, with intrepidity and unconcern; with the cheerfulness of a mind at perfect ease, reposing itself in full confidence and security on the great Disposer of all human events.

* Matth. vi. 35. 1 Pet. v. 7. Rom. viii. 28.

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IV. That future state of existence, of which Christianity first gave us a clear and distinct view, affords a prospect to us that cannot well fail to cheer and enliven our hearts, and even bear us up under the heaviest pressures of affliction. Without this support, there are, it must be owned, calamities sufficient to break the highest spirits, and to subdue the firmest minds.—When the good and virtuous man is unjustly accused and inhumanly traduced; when enemies oppress and friends desert him; when poverty and distress come upon him like an armed man; when his favorite child, or his beloved companion, is snatched from him by death; when he is racked with incessant pain, or pining away with incurable disease; when he knows, moreover, that he can have no rest but in the grave, and supposes that this rest is the absolute extinction of his being; no wonder that he sinks into melancholy and despair. But let the divine light of immortality break in upon him, and the gloom that surrounds him clears up. Let this day-star arise before him, and it will shed a brightness over the whole scene of his existence, which will make every thing look gay and cheerful around him. He is no longer the same being he was before. A new set of ideas and sentiments, of hopes and expectations, spring up in his mind, and represent every thing in a point of view totally different from that in which they before appeared to him. What he had been accustomed to consider as insupportable misfortunes, he now sees to be most salutary chastisements. This world is no longer his home. It is a scene of discipline, a school of virtue, a place of education, intended to fit him for appearing well in a far more illustrious station. Under this conviction he goes on with alacrity and steadiness in the paths of duty, neither discouraged by difficulties, nor depressed by misfortunes. He is a citizen of a heavenly country, towards which he is travelling: his accommodations on the road are sometimes, it must be owned, wretched enough; but they are only *temporary* inconveniencies; they are trivial disquietudes, which are below

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his notice; for *at home* he knows every thing will be to his mind. The blessings which there await him, and on which his heart is fixed, inspire him with an ardor and alacrity that carry him through every obstacle. Even under the most calamitous circumstances, he supports himself with this reflection, more pregnant with good sense and solid comfort, than all the vast volumes of ancient Philosophy or modern Infidelity, that "these light afflictions, which are but for a moment, shall work for him (if he bears them with "Christian patience) a far more exceeding and eternal "weight of glory*."

V. There remains still another ground of joy peculiar to the Gospel; and that is, the consolation and assistance of the Holy Ghost. It is a circumstance of wonderful beauty and utility in the Christian dispensation, that one of those three divine persons, who each bore their share in the great work of our redemption, condescends to contribute also to our present tranquillity: to abide with us here constantly upon earth; to assume the endearing name, and perform the truly benevolent office, of a COMFORTER. Under this character and title, the Holy Spirit was promised to the apostles by our Savour, in his last affecting address to them, in order to alleviate their grief for his approaching departure. This promise was most punctually and amply fulfilled on the day of Pentecost; and from that time we see the influence of this heavenly Paraclete most eminently displayed in that astonishing and almost instantaneous turn which it gave to the sentiments, the language, and the conduct of the apostles. From being timorous, dejected, and perplexed, shocked at the ignominious end of their Lord, afraid to appear in public, dubious, hesitating, and indecisive; on a sudden they become courageous, undaunted, cheerful. They openly avow, and boldly preach, that once offensive doctrine of a crucified Saviour. They profess themselves his disciples: they call upon all men to believe in him; and set before them, with all the powers

* 2 Cor. iv. 17.

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of the most masculine eloquence, the evidences and the doctrines of the Christian faith. No complaints from that time; no dejection of spirits; no discontent. Though they were persecuted, afflicted, tormented, yet it was all joy, and triumph, and exultation of heart. "We are troubled," says St. Paul, "on every side, "yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in des- "pair; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, "but not killed; as sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing; "as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, "and yet possessing all things; and though our out- "ward man perish, yet our inward man is renewed day "by day*." Even St. Peter himself, he who had the weakness to deny his blessed Master in the extremity of his distress; even he, after the descent of the Holy Ghost, was the very first to rise up in his defence, and in a long and spirited speech to vindicate his pretensions, and assert the truth of his doctrines. The same alacrity and joyfulness spread itself to all the converts. "For they that believed were together, and "had all things common, and sold their possessions "and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man "had need; and continuing daily with one accord in "the temple, did eat their meat with *gladness* and "singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor "with all the people†."

Such were the cheerful scenes which the first dawn of the Gospel, and the first appearance of the comforter, present to us: and although these were indeed, preturnatural effects, arising from such extraordinary effusions of the Spirit, as were peculiar to those times, and not to be expected in our own; yet in some degree, his sacred influence will still remain; and to every one that is worthy of his consolations, we will still be a comforter. We are assured by the best authority, "that he will abide with us for ever; that he "will dwell with us; that he will be with us always to "the end of the world; that the fruit of the Spirit is "love, joy, peace; that the kingdom of God is right-

* 2 Cor. iv. 16. † Acts ii. 46, 47.

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"teousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost*." If, therefore, we constantly and devoutly pray for his divine assistance; if we do not grieve him by any sinful thoughts and actions; if we endeavor, by the most unblemished purity of mind and sanctity of life, to render ourselves fit temples for him to inhabit; we may depend upon it that he will be our guide and companion, our comfort and support; will, in temptation, give us fortitude, in affliction patience, in prosperity thankfulness, in poverty content; will, in every condition and circumstance of life, impart to us that PEACE OF GOD, that heartfelt joy and satisfaction, which passes all understanding and all description.

Before I conclude, I must beg your attention to one short, but, as I conceive, important observation, resulting from the foregoing discourse.

We of this kingdom have been repeatedly stigmatized by the other nations of Europe as a melancholy, dejected, gloomy people. The charge, I fear, is upon the whole but too well founded; and the proofs too visible, and sometimes too dreadful, to be evaded or denied. It behoves us therefore, surely, to inquire a little into the true causes of this national malady; and to consider, whether *one* of these causes may not be a contemptuous disregard, or, at least, a cold indifference for that most pure, and holy, and enlivening Religion, which contains the only true remedy for our disease. Instead of this, we have too commonly recourse to a very different mode of relief, to those pernicious cordials of unbounded pleasure and endless dissipation, which though like other cordials, they may raise our spirits for the moment, yet afterwards sink and depress them beyond recovery, and leave the unhappy patient infinitely more in distress and danger than they found him. If this be the case we know what we have to do. We must fly to a totally opposite regimen; to that purity of mind, that sanctity of manners, that self-government, that moral discipline, that modesty of desire, that discreet and temperate en-

* John xiv. 16; Rom. viii. 9; Matth. xxviii. 20; Gal. v. 22; Rom. xiv. 17.

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joyment of the world, that exalted piety, that active benevolence, that trust in Providence, that exhilirating hope of immortality, that reliance on the merits of our Redeemer, which the doctrines and the precepts of the Gospel so powerfully impress upon our souls, and which, as we have seen, are the best and most effectual preservatives against all depression of spirits. It is here, in short, if any where, true cheerfulness is to be found. To those, indeed, who have been long dissolved in luxury and gaiety, that moderation in all things which Christianity prescribes, may, at first, appear a harsh and painful restraint; but a little time, and a little perseverance, will render it as delightful as it is confessedly salutary. Be prevailed on then, for once, to give it a fair trial; and accept, with all thankfulness, that most gracious invitation of our blessed Redeemer, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy la-"den, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon "you, and learn of me, and ye shall find rest unto your "souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burthen is "light*."

* Matth. xi. 28—30.

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SERMON XX.

1 Cor. i. 20.

Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?

THE subject on which St. Paul is speaking in this chapter, and which drew from him the exclamation in the text, is the doctrine of the Cross: that is, the atonement made for the sins of mankind by the crucifixion of our blessed Lord. This is a topic on which he always speaks with an air of peculiar triumph and exultation: and in this chapter more especially, he enlarges upon it with unusual strength of argument and eloquence. He was not ignorant that this doctrine gave the utmost offence both to the Jew and to the Greek: but notwithstanding this, he asserts, "that "it was the power of God unto salvation*." He was no stranger to the numberless objections made to it by the profound reasoners and the fashionable philosophers of the age, who are here distinguished by the appellation of the *wise*, the *scribe*, the *disputer of this world*; but their wisdom, their learning, their skill in disputation, had no weight with him. He considered their idle cavils and subtilties as utterly unworthy of his notice. He affirmed, that their boasted science and erudition never had been, never could be, of the least use to mankind, in leading them to the knowledge and practice of true Religion; "and that the world by

* Romans i. 16.

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"wisdom," (*by such* wisdom as they possessed) "knew not God:" whereas, what *they* called the foolishness of preaching*;" the foolishness of preaching the great doctrine of Redemption, had already enlightened the minds, and reformed the hearts of a prodigious number of people, and thus made "foolish the "wisdom of this world;" had shewn the weakness and impotence of worldly wisdom, when compared with the rapid and astonishing effects produced by the so much derided doctrine of Redemption. Transported with these ideas, the apostle breaks out into the sublime apostrophe of the text: "Where is the "scribe? where is the wise? where is the disputer "of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wis-"dom of this world?"

Since the time of this great apostle, his argument, drawn from the inefficacy of Rabinical learning and Gentile philosophy, compared with the consequences of the Christian revelation, has acquired additional force by the propagation of the latter, and the reformation wrought by it through a large part of the world, and the light diffused by it into almost every other part; whilst the wise and the disputers of this world have never been able to work any considerable change in the dispositions and manners of a single city, or even a single village, throughout the earth. Yet, notwithstanding this apparent superiority, there are not wanting persons who are full of objections to the Gospel of Christ; and especially to that capital and fundamental article of it of which we have been speaking, the *doctrine of atonement* by the death of Christ.

If (say these disputers) it was God's purpose to rescue mankind from the dominion and the punishment of sin, what need was there of so many strange expedients, and such a long course of laborious and uncouth arrangements, for the accomplishment of this design? What necessity was there, that no less a person than the Son of God himself should be sent from heaven to this lower world to take upon him our flesh; that his very

* 1 Cor. i. 21.

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birth should be a contradiction to the common course of nature; that he should be allied to mean and indigent parents, live for many years an obscure life, then go about preaching a new Religion, full indeed of excellent precepts, but abounding also with mysterious, and unintelligible, and seemingly useless doctrines; that he should go through a long series of indignities and sufferings, which he might easily have avoided; should at length submit to a most painful and ignominious death; should afterwards rise from the grave, ascend into heaven, there sit down at the right hand of God, and then send another divine person, called the Holy Ghost, to finish what he had left undone?

What necessity, it is asked, could there possibly be for such a complicated piece of mechanism as this; for such a multiplicity of instruments, and such a variety of contrivances, as are here set in motion, to effect one single, and, to all appearance, very easy purpose, the pardon of a few wretched criminals? Why could not God have done this at once, by one decisive and gracious exertion of mercy and of power; by publishing, for instance, an act of general indemnity and oblivion for past offences, on condition of sincere repentance and amendment of life? Is not this a plain, simple, and natural manner of proceeding, and far more worthy of the wisdom and the majesty of the Supreme Being, than that intricate, operose, and circuitous kind of process in the work of our Redemption, which the Gospel ascribes to him?

In answer to all these specious cavils, it might be sufficient to say, "Who art thou, O man, that re-"pliest against God?" Shall the sinner that is saved, say to him that redeemed him, Why hast thou redeemed me thus? "As well might the thing formed, "say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me "thus* ?" Objections of such a nature, and from such a quarter, prove nothing more, than that man is as presumptuous as he is ignorant and weak.

That the method which God made use of to redeem man by the death of Christ, is very different from that

* Rom. xix. 20.

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which a modern Philosopher would have made use of, may be very safely admitted, without in the least impeaching either the propriety or the wisdom of that method. That God's proceedings are always infinitely wise, is most ceartain; but he does not conduct himself on the principles of mere human wisdom. "His ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as "our thoughts." It is not always in man to perceive the fitness of those means which God makes use of to obtain his ends; though there can be no doubt but they are the fittest that could have been imagined. Who could have supposed, that the way to exalt Joseph to the highest pinnacle of worldly grandeur and prosperity, was to sell him as a slave to a company of travelling Ishmaelites*? What apparent probability was there, that Goliah, the great champion of the Philistines, should fall by the hand of a stripling, unused to arms, and furnished only with a stone and a sling? How indignant was the mighty Syrian, Naaman, when he was told that, in order to be cured of his leprosy, he must wash himself seven times in Jordan? He expected something very different from this. "Behold, I thought," says he, "that the "Man of God will surely come out to me, and stand "and call on the name of the Lord his God, and "strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. "Are not Abana and Pharphar, rivers of Damascus, "better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash "in them, and be clean†?" So reasoned this wise man; and so would any other wise man of modern times have reasoned on this occasion. But it proved in this, as it will in every other instance, "the foolish-"ness of God was wiser than men; and the weakness "of God was stronger than men‡." He washed in Jordan, and was clean.

* In this, and perhaps one or two other places, a few remarks from other authors have, I believe, (in the course of my reading many years ago) insensibly mingled themselves with my own. But who those authors were I cannot at this distance of time distinctly recollect.

† 2 Kings v. 11. ‡ 1 Cor. i. 25.

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Nay, even in the ordinary course of God's providence, what a number of things do we see conducted in a manner totally different from what one should naturally expect? To instance only in that daily bread, which is the chief support of life. How comes it to pass, may the disputers of this world say, that so much trouble and pains are requisite to produce so essential an article for our sustenance as this? What occasion can there be, that it should go through so tedious a process, such a long train of preparatory operations, before it becomes fit for use? How strange does it seem, that the grain, which is to be our food, should first of all be buried in the ground; there remain for some time invisible and useless, and apparently dead*; then spring forth with fresh life, and in a new form; arrive by slow degrees, to a state of maturity, and afterwards employ a prodigious number of hands; undergo a great variety of changes, and assume many different appearances, before it can be manufactured into that solid substance, which affords so much strength and nourishment to man? Might not Providence have obtained the same end by much more obvious and expeditious means? Might not our daily bread be rained down upon us at once from heaven, like the manna of the Israelites; or be made to vegetate on trees, as is the case in some parts of the southern hemisphere, where nature has left no other trouble to man but to gather his bread and eat it, whilst we are forced to labor after it through innumerable difficulties and delays? These questions are just as modest and as proper as those we are apt to ask concerning the mode of our Redemption. And as we find that Providence has

* *Apparently dead.* The sacred writers say, that the grain actually dies† : and Voltaire, in his *Questions sur l' Encyclopedie*‡ triumphs not a little in this supposed error. But a much better physiologist than Mr. Voltaire (I mean Mr. Bonet, of Geneva) affirms, that the position may be justified as philosophically true. The *exterior integument of the grain* does most certainly corrupt and die. It is the germ only, or principle of vegetation, which remains and lives. "L'Enveloppe du grain perit, & de son "interieur sort une plante bien differente de cette enveloppe."

Essia Analytique, &c. par Mr. Bonet, & Bibliotheque des Sciences, 1771. *Prem. part. p.* 145.

† 1 *Cor.* xv. 36. ‡ *Article Agriculture.*

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not thought fit to humor our prejudices, and conform to our ideas, in the one case, why should we expect it in the other? We may, in both cases, with equal truth and justice, say, "Where is the wise? where is the "scribe? where is the disputer of this world? Hath "not God made foolish the wisdom of this world*?" But let us descend a little more to particulars.

We are told, that to save mankind from the punishment due to their sins, the promulgation of a free pardon, on the part of God, would have been fully sufficient.

Let us suppose then for a moment, that this had actually been the case. Let us suppose, that the Son of God, or some other divine messenger, had been sent on earth merely to tell mankind, that they need be under no apprehensions about the consequences of their sins, for that they would all be freely forgiven: and that, provided they behaved better for the future, they would be received into the favor of God, and rewarded with everlasting life. What do you think must have been the consequence of such a general unqualified act of grace and indemnity as this? Would it not have given the world reason to imagine, that God was regardless of the conduct of his creatures, and that there was little or no danger in transgressing his laws? Would not this easiness of disposition, this facility in pardoning, have given men encouragement to continue in their sins; or, at least, to have returned in a short time to their favorite and long-indulged habits, in a certain expectation of meeting with the same gentle treatment which they had already experienced? And does not every one see, that this would have quickly extinguished all the little remains of virtue that were left in the world? There was, indeed, I allow, some ground to hope, that a God of infinite mercy and goodness would find out *some* means of saving a guilty world from destruction. But no man of common sense could imagine, that he would do this in such a manner as should be inconsistent with his other attributes;

* 1 Corinth. i. 20.

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those attributes, which are as essential to his nature as his goodness and his mercy; I mean, his justice, his wisdom, his authority, as the moral governor of the universe. All these must have been shaken to their very foundation, had he pardoned mankind without some satisfaction made to him for their disobedience; without some mark of his abhorrence stampt upon guilt; without some public exercise of his coercive power, which might prevent the sinner from flattering himself, that he might go on transgressing with impunity, and might safely presume on the mercy of God, even in prejudice to the great ends of his moral government.

But repentance, you say, would of itself have answered all these purposes; would have been a sufficient atonement for past offences, a sufficient satisfaction to God's justice, and a sufficient security to the sinner against the future effects of God's displeasure.

Admitting all this for a moment to be true, there is still another question of some importance to be asked and answered, and which yet is commonly quite left out of the account. What reason have you to think, that had Christ done nothing more than offered to the Heathen world a free pardon of their sins, on condition of repentance, they would have accepted and performed that condition; in other words, that, without some signal indication of God's abhorrence of sin, to strike their imagination, to affect their hearts, and rouse their consciences to a just sense of their guilt, they would ever have repented at all?

Consider only for a moment what the condition of mankind was, when our Lord made his appearance on earth. Their corruption and profligacy had grown to so enormous an height, and ran out into such a variety of horrible vices, as even in these degenerate days would appear shocking and portentous. They were, as St. Paul assures us in a letter addressed to those very Romans of whom he is speaking, "they were filled "with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, "covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder,

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" debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters;
" haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors
" of evil things, disobedient to parents, without un-
" derstanding, covenant breakers, without natural af-
" fection, implacable, unmerciful*."

What now do you think of such a race of monsters as these? Do you think it possible, that mere exhortation alone, or even the most awful denunciations of punishment, would ever have brought such miscreants as these to real repentance and vital reformation! What little probability there was of this, you will judge from what St. Paul further tells you in the same epistle that they not only did these things themselves, but took " pleasure in those that did them†." They were delighted to see their friends, their neighbors, and even their own children, grow every day more profligate around them. " They became vain in their imagina-
" tions, and their foolish heart was darkened‡."
" They were alienated from the life of God, through
" the ignorance that was in them, because of the blind-
" ness of their heart; they were *past feeling*, and
" gave themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work
" all uncleanness with greediness‖." This shows, that the number and the grossness of their crimes had effaced all their ideas of guilt, and " had seared their
" consciences with a hot iron§." Add to this, that their philosophers and their priests, who ought to have restrained their vices, did themselves, by their own example, encourage them in some of their worst. Many parts even of their religious worship, instead of purifying and reforming, tended to corrupt and debase their hearts with the grossest sensualities; and the very gods whom they adored were represented as guilty of crimes too shocking to be specified, but which all who sought their favor would certainly take care to imitate.¶ You see then what little prospect there was, that men under such circumstances should ever be prevailed on,

* Rom. i. 29, 30, 31. † Rom. i. 32. ‡ Rom. i. 21.
‖ Eph. iv. 18, 19. § 1 Tim. iv. 2.
¶ Ego homuncio hoc non facerem? See the whole passage. Terent. Eun. iii. v. 43.

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by a mere preacher of righteousness (even though sent from the realms, and endued with the eloquence, of heaven) to repent and reform. Before they could do either, they must be sensible that they were acting wrong. But they, on the contrary, thought themselves right. They not only acted wickedly, but acted so on principle. Their moral sense was inverted, "The "light that was in them was become darkness." They had no check within to stop their mad career of wickedness; and every thing without, every thing that ought to have taught them a better lesson, their philosophers, their priests, their religion, their worship, their gods themselves, all contributed to confirm and strengthen them in their corrupt practices, and to bar up every avenue to reformation.

It is therefore evident, that, without some awakening call, some striking and astonishing, and extraordinary event, (like that of the crucifixion of Christ) to affect the hearts and alarm the fears of the ancient Pagans, and to impress them with a strong sense of God's extreme indignation against sin, it was morally impossible they could ever have been brought to a serious, effectual, and permanent amendment of heart and life*.

It is in vain, then, to talk of the great efficacy of repentance in averting the anger of the Almighty, and atoning for past offences. You ought first to settle the previous question, whether, if this *had* been all the expiation required, there would have been any repenting sinners in the world to have tried the experiment?

But to grant all this power of expiation to repentance, is granting a great deal more than truth will warrant.

* It is a singular circumstance, which I have from unquestionable authority, and which tends very much to show the powerful influence of a crucified Redeemer, that in almost every part of the world, from Greenland to the West India islands, those Heathens, that have been proselyted to Christianity, were principally and most effectually wrought upon by the history of our Saviour's sufferings, as recorded in the Gospel. When these were forcibly stated, and repeatedly impressed on their minds, they scarce ever failed to produce in them both a lively faith and a virtuous life.

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For from whence do you learn, that repentance alone will obliterate the stains of past guilt; will undo every thing you have done amiss; will reinstate you in the favor of God; will make ample satisfaction to his insulted justice; and secure respect and obedience to his authority, as the moral governor of the world?

Do the Scriptures teach you this? No. They plainly tell you, that "without the shedding of blood, there "is no remission of sins*." But, perhaps, you collect it from the very nature of the thing itself. Consider then what repentance is. It is nothing more than sorrow for what we have done amiss, and a resolution not to do it again.

But can this annihilate what is past? Most assuredly it has no such power. Our former transgressions still remain uncancelled. They are recorded in the books of heaven; and it is not our future good deeds alone that can wipe them out. They can only answer for themselves (if they can do that): they have no superabundant or retrospective merit to spare, as a cover to past offences. We may as well affirm, says a learned divine, "that our former obedience atones for "our present sins, as that our present obedience makes "amends for antecedent transgressions."

If you think this doctrine harsh and unnatural, see whether your own daily experience, whether the ordinary course of human affairs, will teach you a different lesson.

Look around you, and observe what is passing every moment before your eyes. You see men frequently destroying by sensuality, by intemperance, by every act of profligacy, their health, their fortune, their character, their happiness here and hereafter. You see them, perhaps, afterwards most heartily sorry for what they have done; sincerely repenting of their wickedness; resolving for the future to lead a virtuous and religious life, and perhaps fulfilling that resolution. But does this always restore them to their health, their fortune, or their good fame? No: they are often gone

* Heb. ix. 22.

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for ever, lost beyond redemption, notwithstanding their utmost efforts to recover them. The wretch that has committed a murder, may be struck with the deepest remorse and horror for his crime, and may most seriously determine to make every amends for it in his power. But does this save him from the hand of justice, from the punishment denounced against his offence by law? We know that it does not. Unless some powerful mediator or friend interpose to obtain his pardon, he will fall by the hand of the executioner. And in a multitude of other instances, nothing but the generous kindness of our friends, and their readiness to encounter great inconvenience, expense, trouble, and misery, for our sakes, can avert the fatal consequences which our indiscretions, follies, and vices would, in spite of the sincerest repentance and remorse, infallibly bring upon us*. Since then, notwithstanding the mercy and the goodness of God, repentance does not prevent the natural penal consequences of our crimes in this world, what reason is there to think, that it will avert the vengeance due to them in the next, which is under the government of the same Almighty Being?

That it is incapable of producing this effect, will appear further from the consideration, that the sincerest repentance and reformation must necessarily be in some degree imperfect, mixed with failings, and subject to occasional relapses; and therefore, instead of atoning for past transgressions, must themselves stand in need of indulgence and forgiveness. If repentance placed us in a state of moral perfection and unsinning obedience, there might be some pretence, perhaps, for ascri-

* It is remarkable, that our Lord himself compares his interposition to save us from ruin to the generous interference of a man to rescue his friend from destruction. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his *friends*† ;" alluding, evidently, to this instance of his love for us. This, perhaps, might suggest the idea of that noble principle of analogy, by which Bishop Butler has so admirably illustrated, and so unanswerably defended the great Scriptural doctrine of our Redemption, by Christ interfering *as a friend* in our behalf, and voluntarily substituting himself for us on the cross.

† *John* xv. 13.

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bing to it a considerable degree of expiatory virtue. But let the truest and devoutest penitent look impartially into his own heart, and then let him fairly say, whether this is actually the case. Has he so completely washed his hands in innocency, and purified his soul from sin, that not a single evil propensity remains within him? Has he entirely subdued every inveterate habit, every inordinate passion, every sin that did most easily beset him? Is it all calmness, composure, peace and order within? Is all rancor and malice laid asleep in his breast? Can he forgive the grossest insults, the cruelest calumnies, and the most unprovoked injuries? Do his thoughts never wander beyond the limits of his duty, nor his eye delight to dwell on improper objects? Are his affections detached from this world, and fixed entirely on things above? Does his heart glow with unbounded love towards his neighbor, and is it touched with the hallowed flame of piety and devotion towards his Maker? When he can truly say, that this is a genuine picture of his soul, he may then, if he thinks fit, reject a crucified Redeemer. But till then, he will do well not to lean too confidently on repentance as his *only* stay.

If, then, neither Scripture nor experience teach us, that repentance alone will avil for our pardon with God, does the light of nature assure us that it will? To know what are the genuine dictates of nature, you must not look for them in a land enlightened by Revelation; you must go back to those ages and those countries, where nature was, indeed, the only guide that men had to direct their ways. And what was then their opinion of the efficacy of repentance? Did the ancient Pagans entertain such high notions of it, as some theologians, in the present times, seem to have taken up? By no means; we scarce ever hear *them* talking of repentance. When they had offended their gods, they thought of nothing but oblations, expiations, lustrations, and animal sacrifices. These were the expedients to which they always had recourse to regain the forfeited favor of their deities. This universal

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practice of *shedding blood* to obtain the pardon of guilt, most clearly shows what the common apprehensions of mankind were on this subject, when under the sole direction of their own understanding: it shows, they thought that something else was necessary, besides their own repentance and reformation, to appease the anger of their gods. They thought that, after all they could do for themselves, something must be done or suffered by some other being, before they could be restored to the condition they would have been in if they had never forfeited their innocence. Nay, some of the greatest, and wisest, and best among them declared, in express terms, "that there was wanting "*some universal method of delivering men's souls* which "no sect of Philosophy had ever yet found out*."

This universal method of delivering men's souls, (as it is here most properly and most emphatically called) was at length made known to mankind by the Christian Revelation which we have been here considering. Our blessed Lord was himself the great, the all-atoning Victim, offered up for the whole world upon the cross. "He "was wounded for our transgressions, and on him the "Lord hath laid the iniquity of us all†." "He bore our "sins in his own body on the tree, that we being dead to "sin should live unto righteousness‡." He was, in short, the very Paschal Lamb, which was slain for us from the foundation of the world. He was the great universal Sacrifice to which all the prophets, from the fall of Adam to the birth of Christ, uniformly directed their views and their predictions and of which all the sacrifices under the Jewish law were only types and emblems. *They* were the shadow: Christ was the substance. And, as the writer to the Hebrews justly observes, "if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the "ashes of an heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sancti-"fied to the purifying of the flesh;" (that is, released the offender from legal uncleanness and temporal punishment) "how much more shall the blood of Christ,

* Porphyry, as quoted by Austin, de Civitate Dei. I. 10. c. 32.
† Isaiah liii. 5, 6. ‡ 1 Peter ii. 24.

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"who, through the eternal Spirit, offered himself "without spot to God, purge your consciences from "dead works, to serve the living God* ?"

This is, in a few words, the sum and substance of the great mystery of our Redemption. That it is a mystery, a great and astonishing mystery, we readily acknowledge. But this was naturally to be expected in a work of such infinite difficulty, as that of rendering the mercy of God, in pardoning mankind, consistent with the exercise of his justice, and the support of his authority, as the moral Governor of the world. Whatever could effect this, must necessarily be something far beyond the comprehension of our limited understandings; that is, must necessarily be mysterious. And, therefore, this very circumstance, instead of shocking our reason and staggering our faith, ought to satisfy the one, and confirm the other.

What remains further to be said on this interesting and important subject, I shall reserve for a separate discourse.

* Heb. ix. 13, 14.——The Socinians say, that the expressions in Scripture, which seem to prove the death of Christ to be a real sacrifice for sin, are nothing more than figurative allusions to the animal sacrifices of the Mosaical law. But it has been well observed, that the *very reverse* of this is the truth of the case. For these Mosaical sacrifices were themselves allusions to the great all-sufficient Sacrifice, which was to be made by our Saviour on the cross.

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SERMON XXI.

1 Cor. i. 20.

Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?

FROM the train of reasoning pursued in the preceding discourse, it has, I trust, been made evident, that though repentance and reformation are without doubt indisputably necessary towards procuring the pardon of sin, (*so* necessary, that without them not all the sacrifices on earth, nor all the mercies of heaven, can avail to save us) yet they are not *of themselves* sufficient to wash away the stains of past guilt, to satisfy the justice of an offended God, and restore a wicked and rebellious world to his protection and favor.

It appears, both from the nature of the things themselves, from the clearest deductions of reason, from the ordinary course of human affairs in the present world, from the common apprehensions, and the universal practice of mankind, before the appearance of Christ upon earth, and above all, from the positive declarations of God himself, both in the Old and New Testament, that, besides the contrition of the sinner himself, something must be done or suffered by some other being on his account; some sort of expiation must be made for him, and accepted, before he can be exonerated of guilt, and redeemed from punishment, and stand justified in the eyes of his offended Maker.

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"This principle being established; (and it appears to me incontrovertible) who shall afterwards presume to say, that the particular kind of expiation, or, in other words, the particular mode of Redemption, which God actually fixed upon for the preservation of mankind, was not the best and fittest that could be devised? If *some* victim, *some* propitiatory sacrifice, was plainly necessary for this purpose; who shall undertake to affirm, that the very individual sacrifice appointed by God himself, was not the properest and most effectual to answer the end proposed? If commutative punishment and vicarious suffering appear not only to have prevailed among all Heathen nations from the earliest ages, and to have been established among the Jews by the express appointment of God, but even at this hour to make a part of the ordinary dispensations of God's providence in the present world, (where we continually see men rescued from ruin by the interposing kindness, the generous exertions, and the voluntary sufferings of others on their account); who shall say, that there was either cruelty or injustice, in appointing Christ to die, much less in his voluntary consent to die, "for us men and for our salvation?" If, in fine, the value of the victim offered was usually proportioned to the magnitude of the offence, and the number of the offenders; why should it appear in the least incredible, that when the inhabitants of a whole world, (perhaps of many worlds and systems of worlds) and all their generations, from the very fall of our first parents to the end of time, were to be cleansed from guilt, nothing less than the blood of the Son of God himself, should be thought to possess sufficient purifying powers to wash away stains of so deep a dye, and so vast extent?

It is evident, then, that all the plausible objections of "the wise, the scribe, the disputer of this world," against the Scripture doctrine of Redemption, founded on the nature of the sacrifice made by our Lord, on the dignity of his person, on the union of the divine nature with the man Christ Jesus, or any other circum-

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stances of that nature, are utterly void of all foundation in truth, in reason, in experience, and in the actual course of human affairs in God's administration of the universe. We may, therefore, safely dismiss them without further notice: and may assume it as an undoubted truth, that though we ourselves could not, with our short-sighted faculties, discover the smallest traces of wisdom or propriety in the Redemption of the world by the death of Christ, yet that it is in fact the wisest that could be chosen; that the difficulties attending it arise only from that impenetrable darkness which surrounds the throne of the Almighty, and must necessarily rest on many of his works, both of nature and of grace; and that it is, notwithstanding, as the Scripture most accurately and sublimely expresses it, "the wisdom of God in a mystery*." Yet still, by contemplating this mystery attentively, we may, even with our limited understandings, discover some marks of divine wisdom; some reasons, which might induce the Almighty to prefer this method of redeeming the world to any other; reasons sufficient at least to show, that when the veil is wholly withdrawn, when we no longer "see through a glass darkly," but are admitted to contemplate "in open day" the whole plan and the entire system of our redemption, we shall have as much reason to reverence the depth of the counsels of the Almighty, as we confessedly have, even at present, with all our ignorance, and all the natural obscurity of the subject, to adore his goodness.

Out of many of these marks of divine wisdom, in the mode of our Redemption, which might be produced, I shall select only a few of the most important.

I. In the first place, it has often been, and cannot be too often, remarked, that the atonement made on the cross for the sins of man, removed a difficulty, which "the wise, the scribe, the disputer of this "world," with all their wisdom, were never able to surmount. It reconciled a contradiction, which to every human understanding appeared insuperable. It re-

* 1 Cor. ii. 7.

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conciled the mercy and the justice of God in his treatment of mankind. It gave salvation to a guilty world, without either inflicting on the offenders the punishment justly due to their offences, or giving countenance and encouragement to sin. By accepting the death of Christ instead of ours, "by laying on him "the iniquity of us all," God certainly gave us the most astonishing proof of his mercy: and yet, by accepting no less a sacrifice than that of his own Son, he has, by this most expressive and tremendous act, signified to the whole world such extreme indignation at sin, as may well alarm, even while he saves us, and make us "tremble at his severity, even while we are "within the arms of his mercy*."

II. The appearance of Christ in the form of man, and the death he suffered for our sakes, did not only make our peace with God, but it also enabled him to afford us the strongest possible proof of that most comfortable doctrine, our resurrection from the dead, by his own return to life again after lying three days in the grave. It was, therefore, a most eminent proof of divine wisdom, that the very same event, the death of Christ, should answer two such important purposes; should both afford us the means of reconciliation with God, and at the same time give birth to another great event, which fills us with the joyful hope and the certain expectation of everlasting life. Nay, even the public and ignominious manner in which our Lord expired, and which has sometimes been a ground of objection and of reproach, was in reality an additional indication of divine wisdom. For had our Lord's death been less public and notorious, and had his person been in his last moments less exposed to the observation of mankind, the proof of his resurrection from the dead would have been considerably weakened. Had his death been private and silent, and after the ordinary manner of men, the reality of it would very soon have been questioned; and consequently his resurrection would have been represented as a gross fraud

* Scott's Christian Life, b. 3.

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and a scandalous imposition on the credulity of mankind. But his crucifixion in the face of day, and in the presence of an immense concourse of people, took away every pretence of this nature, and gave a strong and irresistible confirmation to the truth of that astonishing miracle which followed; which is the foundation of all our hopes, and the great corner-stone of our whole Religion.

III. Before the appearance of our Saviour on earth, there was a notion universally prevalent in every part almost of the known world, that sin could no otherwise be expiated than by animal sacrifices. And this at length was carried so far, that in some extraordinary cases it was thought that the death of brute animals was not sufficient. Human sacrifices became necessary; and the more near and dear the person sacrificed was to them, the more valuable was the offering thought; so that they frequently slaughtered their sons and daughters, more especially their first-born, on the altars of their gods. Now the death of Christ, at the same time that it was a gracious condescension to the prevailing opinion of the necessity of sacrifice, put an entire end (through a great part of the world) to that sanguinary species of devotion, by rendering it totally useless and inefficacious. For "Christ was offered "once for all; by one offering he perfected for ever "them that are sanctified*;" and obtained, by one single act, that which mankind had, from the beginning of the world, been endeavoring in vain to accomplish, by innumerable and continual sacrifices, namely, the pardon of their sins, and reconciliation with God. After this universal and effectual expiation, no other was of the least use or value. Accordingly, in every country that embraced the Gospel, all sacrifices, both animal and human, immediately ceased; and a sudden and absolute period was put to that incredible effusion of blood, which had deluged the world almost from the very creation down to that time.

* Hebrews x. 10. 14.

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IV. At the same time, that the sacrifice made by Christ upon the cross put an end to all other sacrifices, it gave (what they could never give) *an absolute certainty* of pardon, on the condition of repentance and reformation of life. This it was impossible that any one could rationally expect from the slaughter of an innocent animal, much less from that of a human being. Both these acts seemed in themselves, rather calculated to increase guilt than to take it away. God might, indeed, if he pleased, accept the commutation of one life for another; and it was on this presumption that the Heathen world adopted the custom of sacrifices. But this was certainly a mere presumption. Without an express revelation of the divine will in this respect, no one could be absolutely sure that such a substitution would be accepted. But God has now actually declared in the Gospel, that he does accept the death of Christ as a propitiation for our sins. And to put this beyond all doubt, he has ratified and confirmed that acceptance by a public, significant and decisive act of approbation, the act of raising him from the dead.

V. The death of Christ is also a seal and confirmation of the new covenant betwixt God and man.

For it was the custom of almost all ancient nations, both Jews and Gentiles, to ratify their treaties and covenants by sacrifices. Of this you may see instances in various parts of Scripture*, and in several Heathen historians†. In condescension therefore to the manner of men, and to confirm their faith in his promises, God did, by the sacrifice of Christ, seal and ratify his new covenant of mercy with mankind; upon which account the death of our blessed Lord is called (as the Jewish sacrifices also were) "*the blood of the covenant*‡." This, therefore, is another excellent purpose answered, by that method of redeeming us which God was pleased to fix upon: that it is conformable to all those fœderal rights by which men were wont to confirm their

* Gen. xv. Jerem. xxxiv. † Livy, lib. i. c. 24. &c. &c.
‡ Heb. x. 29; xii. 24. Ex. xxiv. 8.

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covenants with each other; and thus gives us every possible assurance, not only by words, but by the most expressive actions, that God will perform all his gracious promises made to us in the Gospel, provided we fulfil the conditions on which alone those promises are made.

These are *some* of the reasons which might possibly induce our Maker to fix on the death of his Son as the best method of redeeming mankind; and there may be, and undoubtedly are, many other reasons for that choice, unknown to us, still more wise and more benevolent than those already specified. Yet these are abundantly sufficient to convince us, that the redemption wrought for us by Christ upon the cross, carries in it the plainest marks of divine wisdom.

Still, however, it may be urged, and it often *is* urged with great confidence, that even admitting the force of every thing here said, admitting the necessity of *some* sacrifice for the expiation of sin, and a sacrifice too of great value and dignity; yet after all, it seems utterly incredible, that the death of no less a person than the Son of God himself should be necessary for this purpose; and that he, in whom all the fulness of the godhead dwelt, should ever consent and condescend to become that sacrifice, and to expire in agonies on the cross for such a creature as man, who occupies so small and and seemingly so inconsiderable a place in the immensity of the universe.

There is undoubtedly something very astonishing in this circumstance. But there are not wanting considerations, which may, in some degree, tend to account even for this acknowledged difficulty.

In the first place, there is a very extraordinary personage mentioned in Scripture, whose existence it is the fashion of the present day to doubt and to deride, and to explain away some of the most striking effects of his power into allegory, metaphor, vision, and imagination. He is, notwithstanding described by the sacred writers in the plainest and the clearest terms, and represented as a being of high rank, of great pow-

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er, and prodigious art and strength. The names there given him are, Satan, Beelzebub, the Devil, and the Prince of the Devils; and he appears to be in a state of perpetual hostility against God and Christ, and this lower world, over which he has very considerable influence. He is described by our Saviour under the image of a *strong man**, whom it was necessary to bind before you could spoil his house. He is called the Prince of the Power of the Air†; the Prince of this World‡; and, by St. Paul, the God of this World‖. He is represented as being at the head of a numerous and formidable host of wicked spirits; to whom St. Paul gives the title of principalities, and powers, and rulers of this world§. And in another place they are said to be his angels¶. To this malignant and insidious Being was owing the fall of our first parents, and all the tragical consequences of that fetal event, the introduction of death and sin, and every kind of natural and moral evil, into the world. On these ruins of human nature did this tremendous spirit erect his infernal throne, and established an astonishing dominion over the minds of men, leading them into such acts of folly, stupidity, and wickedness, as are on no other principle to be accounted for; into the grossest superstitions, into the most brutal and senseless idolatry, into the most unnatural and abominable crimes, into the most execrable rites and inhuman sacrifice**. Nay, what is still more deplorable, he gave the finishing stroke to the disgrace and humiliation of mankind, by setting up *himself* as the object of their adoration, and that too (to complete the insult) under that very form which he had assumed to betray and to destroy them; I mean that of the serpent: the worship of which disgusting and odious animal, it is well known, prevailed to an incredible degree in almost every part of the Pagan world, and is still to be found in some

* Matth. xii. 29. † Ephes. ii. 2. ‡ John xii. 31.
‖ 2 Cor. iv. 4. § Ephes. vi. 12. ¶ Matth. xxv. 41.

** Nothing less than diabolical influence can account for the almost universal custom of human sacrifices, and the attrocious outrages on all decency perpetrated in some of the sacred rites of Egypt, Greece, and Hindostan. See *Maurice's Indian Antiquities*, vol. i. p. 256. 274.

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parts of Africa*. In this manner did Satan lord it over the human race, till our blessed Saviour appeared on earth. At that time his tyranny seems to have arrived at its utmost height, and to have extended to the bodies as well as to the souls of men, of both which he sometimes took absolute *possession*; as we see in the history of those unhappy persons mentioned in Scripture, whom we call Demoniacs, and who were truly said to be *possessed* by the devil. It was therefore necessary, in order to accomplish the complete Redemption of mankind, to subdue in the first place this their most formidable and determined enemy, to destroy his power, to overthrow his kingdom, and to rescue all the sons of men from that horrible and disgraceful state of slavery, in which he had long held them enthralled. Now to execute a work of such magnitude and such difficulty, some agent of extraordinary rank, and extraordinary authority and power, was plainly necessary. Such a personage was our blessed Lord; who therefore spontaneously undertook, and successfully accomplished, this most arduous enterprize. The very first preparatory step he took before he entered on his ministry was, to establish his superiority over this great enemy of the human race, which he did in that memorable scene of the temptation in the wilderness. And throughout the whole of his future life, there appears to have been a constant and open enmity and warfare between Christ and Beelzebub, between the Prince of this world and the Saviour of it, between the Powers of Darkness and the Spiritual Light of the world, between the kingdom of Satan and the kingdom of Jesus. When all this is taken into consideration, it will no longer be a matter of surprise, that the beloved Son of God himself should condescend to come among us, unworthy as we are of such a distinction. For nothing less than his almighty

* See *Bryant's Ancient Mythology*, vol. i. *de ophiolatria*.—A serpent was adored in Egypt as an emblem of the divine nature; and in Cashmere there were no less than 700 places where carved figures of snakes were worshipped. *Maurice's Indian Antiquities*, vol. i. p. 291.———At Whydah, on the Gold Coast, a snake is the principal object of worship. See *Evidence on the Slave Trade*.

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power could probably have vanquished that dreadful adversary we had to deal with, and whose defeat and humiliation appear to have been essentially necessary to our salvation*.

There is still another consideration, which merits some regard in this question.

It is, I believe, generally taken for granted, that it was for the human race alone that Christ suffered and died; and we are then asked, with an air of triumph, whether it be conceivable, or in any degree credible, that the eternal Son of God should submit to so much indignity and so much misery for the fallen, the wicked, the wretched inhabitants of this small globe of earth, which is as a grain of sand to a mountain, a mere speck in the universe, when compared with that immensity of worlds, and systems of worlds, which the sagacity of a great modern astronomer has discovered in the boundless regions of space†.

But on what ground is it concluded, that the benefits of Christ's death extend no further than to ourselves? As well might we suppose, that the sun was placed in the firmament merely to illuminate and to warm this earth that we inhabit. To the vulgar and the illiterate, this actually appears to be the case. But philosophy teaches us better things. It enlarges our contracted views of divine beneficence, and brings us acquainted with other planets and other worlds, which share with us the cheering influence and the vivifying warmth of that glorious luminary. Is it not then a fair analogy to conclude, that the great *Spiritual Light of the world*, the Fountain of life, and health, and joy to the soul, does not scatter his blessings over the creation with a more sparing hand, and that the Sun of Righteousness rises with healing in his wings to other orders of beings besides ourselves? Nor does this conclusion rest on analogy alone. It is evident from Scripture itself, that we are by no means the only creatures

* See John xii. 31; xiv. 30; xvi. 11. 2 Cor. iv. 4. Ephes. ii. 2; vi. 12. Col. ii. 15—"Through death, he destroyed him that had the power "of death; that is, the devil." Heb. ii. 14.

† Dr. Herschell.

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in the universe interested in the sacrifice of our Redeemer. We are expressly told, that as "by him "were all things created that are in heaven and that "are in earth, visible and invisible; and by him all "thing consist: so by him also was God pleased "(having made peace through the blood of his cross) "to reconcile *all things unto himself whether they be* "*things in earth, or things in heaven:* that in the dis-"pensation of the fulness of times, he might gather "together in one *all things in Christ, both which are* "*in heaven, and which are on earth, even in him**."

From intimations such as these, it is highly probable, that in the great work of Redemption, as well as of Creation, there is a vast stupendous plan of wisdom, of which we cannot at present so much as conceive the whole compass and extent. And if we could assist and improve the mental as we can the corporeal sight; if we could magnify and bring nearer to us, by the help of instruments, the great component parts of the spiritual, as we do the vast bodies of the natural world; there can be no doubt, that the resemblance and analogy would hold between them in this as it does in many other well-known instances; and that a scene of wonders would burst in upon us from the one, at least equal, if not superior, to those, which the united powers of astronomy and of optics disclose to us in the other.

If this train of reasoning be just, (and who is there that will undertake to say, much more to prove that it is not so?) if the Redemption wrought by Christ extended to other worlds, perhaps many others besides our own; if its virtues penetrate even into heaven itself; if it gather together *all things* in Christ; who will then say, that the dignity of the agent was disproportioned to the magnitude of the work; and that it was not a scene sufficiently splendid for the Son of God himself to appear upon, and to display the riches of his love, not only to the race of man, but to many other orders of intelligent beings?

* Col. i. 16. 20. Eph. i. 10.

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Upon the whole, it is certainly unpardonable in such a creature as man to judge of the system of our Redemption, from that very small part of it which he now sees; to reason as if we ourselves were the only persons concerned in it, and on that ground to raise cavils, and difficulties, and objections, and represent the cross of Christ as foolishness, when, alas, it is we only that are foolish!

There may undoubtedly be many other ways in which the Redemption of man might have been effected. But this we are sure of, that the way in which it *is* effected, is the wisest and the best, for this plain reason, because the wisest and the best of Beings has chosen it. It has been shown, that even with our short-sighted faculties, and with our very imperfect knowledge of the subject, we can discover *some* reasons which might render, this way of redeeming us preferable to any other; and we have seen also, that it may have a relation to other beings, whose situation and circumstances, if fully and clearly made known to us, would probably furnish us with still stronger reasons to admire and adore the wisdom of God's proceedings towards his creatures. But even admitting, that the benefits of this most extraordinary dispensation were designed to reach no further than this world, and that Christ died solely "for us men, and for our sal-"vation;" what other rational conclusion can be drawn from this supposition, than that we ought to be impressed with a deeper and a livelier sense of his unbounded goodness to the children of men?

That the Son of God should feel such compassion for the human race, as voluntarily to undertake the great and arduous, and painful task of rescuing them from death, and sin, and misery; that for this purpose he should condescend to quit the bosom of his Father, and the joys of heaven; should divest himself of the glory that he had before the world began; should not only take upon himself the nature of man, but the form of a servant; should submit to a low and indigent condition, to indignities, to injuries and insults, and at

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length to a disgraceful and excruciating death, is indeed a mystery. But it is a mystery of kindness and of mercy; it is as the apostle truly calls it, "a love that "passeth knowledge*;" a degree of tenderness, pity, and condescension, to which we have neither words nor conceptions in any degree equal. It is impossible for us, whenever we reflect upon it, not to cry out with the Psalmist, "Lord, what is man that thou art mindful "of him, and the son of man that thou visitest "him†."

And what effect should this reflection have upon our hearts? Should it dispose us to join with the disputer of this world, in doubting and denying the wisdom of the Almighty in the plan of our redemption, and in quarrelling with the means he has made use of to save us, because they appear to our weak understandings strange and unaccountable! Shall the man who is sinking under a mortal disease, refuse the medicine which will infallibly restore him, because he is ignorant of the ingredients of which it is composed? Shall the criminal who is condemned to death, reject the pardon that is unexpectedly offered him because he cannot conceive in what manner and by what means it was obtained for him? Shall we, who are all criminals in the sight of God, and are all actually (till redeemed by Christ) under the sentence of death; shall we strike back the arm that is graciously stretched out to save us, merely because the mercy offered to us is so great, that we are unable to grasp with our understanding the whole extent of it? Shall the very magnitude, in short, of the favor conferred upon us, be converted into an argument against receiving it; and shall we determine not to be saved, because God chuses to do it not in our way, but his own?

That in this and many other instances his ways are mysterious, and past finding out, is undoubtedly true. But let it be remembered always, that the mysterous part relates only to what he has done for us; what we have to do (which is all that it concerns us to know) is

* Eph. iii. 19. † Psalm viii. 4.

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perfectly clear and intelligible. It is nothing more than this, that we prostrate ourselves with all humility before the throne of grace, and adore the goodness of our Maker in consenting, on *any* terms to extend his mercy to us; that we embrace, with gratitude and thankfulness, the great salvation offered to us by the death of Christ, and exert our utmost endeavors to render ourselves capable of sharing in the benefits of that sacrifice, by fulfilling the conditions, the only conditions, on which we can be admitted to partake of it; that is, "by "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and liv- "ing soberly, righteously, and godly in this present "world*."

* Tit. ii. 12.

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SERMON XXII.

PSALM iv. 4.

Commune with your own heart, and in your chamber, and be still.

TO commune with our own hearts, is, in the language of Scripture, to retreat from the world, and give ourselves up to private meditation and reflection. But as the subjects of our meditation may be very different, in order to know what kind of self-communion is here meant, we must consider the purposes which the Psalmist had in view. These purposes are specified in the former part of the verse, "Stand in awe, "and sin not;" to which is immediately subjoined, as the means of impressing this sacred awe upon the mind, "Commune with your own heart, and in your cham- "ber, and be still." The design, therefore, of the self-communion here recommended is, to restrain us from vice; to cherish and improve the seeds of virtue; to give us leisure for examining into the state of our souls: to stamp upon our hearts a love of God and a reverence of his laws; to make us, in short, "stand "in awe, and sin not."

Such is the purport of the injunction in the text: and a more important one it is not easy to imagine: it is, indeed, an essential and indispensible requisite towards our well-being, both here and hereafter. For if we will never stand still and consider, how is it possible we should ever go on well? Yet, notwithstanding the evident necessity of reflection to an intelligent and accountable being, a very large part of mankind seem to

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have formed a resolution never to think at all. They take the utmost pains that they may never experience the misfortune of finding themselves alone and still, may never have a single moment left for serious recollection. They plunge themselves into vice; they dissipate themselves in amusement; they entangle themselves in business; they engage in eager and endless pursuits after riches, honors, power, fame, every trifle, every vanity that strikes their imagination; and to these things they give themselves up, body and soul, without ever once stopping to consider what they are doing and where they are going, and what the consequence must be of all this wildness and folly. In vain does Reason itself sometimes represent to them, that if there really be another state of existence, it is insanity never to concern themselves about it: in vain does God command them, "to watch and pray, and to "work out their salvation with fear, and trembling;" in vain does Religion call upon them to withdraw a little from the busy scene around them, to retire to their own chamber, to be there quiet and still, to commune with their own hearts, to prostrate themselves before God, to lament their sins, to acknowledge their wretchedness, and entreat forgiveness through the merits of their Redeemer. Against all these admonitions they shut their ears, and harden their hearts; and press forward with intrepid gaiety in the course they are emarked in, which they insist upon to be the only wise one. To that wisdom then, and the fruits of it, we must leave them, with our earnest prayers to God, that they may see all things that belong to their peace before they are for ever hid from their eyes. But whatever may become of this giddy unthinking multitude, we, my brethren, who are brought here by a sense of duty, must see, that if we hope either to understand that duty, or to fulfil it, we must sometimes retire and think of it. Even the best and greatest of men, have found this self-communion necessary to preserve them from sin and error. The royal Psalmist more especially, who gave us the precept, enforced it powerfully by his own

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example. Though no one was more attentive to the interests of his people, and good government of his kingdom, had a greater variety of weighty objects to engage his thoughts, more difficulties to encounter, or more temptations to combat than he; yet he never suffered either business, grief, or pleasure, so *entirely* to possess his soul, as to exclude the great concerns of Religion; but wherever or however situated, he found time to commune with himself; he frequently retired at morning, and evening, and noon-day, to review his conduct, to examine into the state of his soul, and search out his spirits, to bless God for his past mercies, or implore his future protection. Those animated compositions he has left us under the name of Psalms, are, in general, nothing more than the fervent expressions of his piety on these occasions, the conversations he held with his own heart. It is in these he unbosoms himself without reserve, and pours forth his whole soul before God. We are admitted into the deepest recesses, and see the most secret workings, of his mind. We see him possessed alternately with hopes and fears, doubt and confidence, sorrow and joy; and agitated, by turns, with all those different passions and emotions which the different aspects of his soul, on the most careful review, would naturally excite. By these well-timed retreats he prevented any presumptuous sin, if not from accidentally surprizing him, yet at least from getting the dominion over him; and though he sometimes slipt, and sometimes even fell, yet he instantly rose again, more vigorous and alert to the discharge of his duty.

But we have this practice of self-communion recommended to us by a still holier and brighter example, that of the blessed Jesus himself. The nature of his mission, indeed, and the boundless benevolence of his temper, necessarily led him to mingle in society; to listen to every call of humanity; to go about doing good, healing diseases, relieving infirmities, correcting errors, removing prejudices, forgiving sins, inculcating repentance; promoting piety, justice, charity, peace,

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harmony, courtesy, cheerfulness among men; crowding, in short into the narrow compass of his ministry, more acts of humanity and kindness, than the longest life of the most beneficent man on earth ever yet produced. Yet, in this active course of life, we find him frequently breaking away from the crowds that surrounded him, and betaking himself to privacy and solitude. The desert, the mountain, and the garden, were scenes which he seemed to love, and with which he took all opportunities of refreshing himself; purchasing them sometimes even at the expense of night-watches, when the day had been wholly taken up in the offices of humanity, and the business of his mission. Here it was he spent whole hours in pious contemplation and fervent prayer; in adoring the goodness of God to mankind; in expressing, on his own part, the utmost submission to his divine will; in reviewing the progress, and looking to the completion, of the great work he had undertaken; in confirming his resolutions, and strengthening his soul against the severe trials he was to undergo in the prosecution of it. From these retreats, and these holy meditations, he came out again into public, not gloomy and languid, not disgusted with the world and discontented with himself, but with recruited spirits, and a redoubled ardor of benevolence; prepared to run again his wonted course, and to pour fresh benefits and mercies on mankind.

If then not only the pious author of the text, but the divine Author of our faith himself, found retirement and recollection necessary to the purposes of a holy life, there can be little doubt of its use and importance to all that are desirous of treading in their steps. But I shall endeavor to shew still more distinctly the advantages attending it, by laying before you the following considerations; considerations, which the present holy season*, set apart for the practice of this very duty, will, I hope, assist in pressing home upon your hearts.

* This Sermon was preached at St. James' Chapel on the first day of Lent, Feb. 6, 1788.

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I. In the first place, it is a truth too notorious to be denied, and too melancholy not to be lamented, that the objects of sense, which here surround us, make a much deeper impression upon the mind than the objects of our faith. And the reason is plain. It is, because the things that are temporal are *seen*; are perpetually soliciting our senses, and forcing themselves upon our observation; whilst the things that are eternal, merely because they are not seen, and therefore want the advantage of continual importunity and solicitation, have but little influence upon our hearts. It is, therefore, the first and most obvious use of retirement, to take off our attention from the things of this world, and thereby to destroy, for a time at least, their attractions. When they cease to be seen, or are seen only in imagination, they lose, in a great measure, their dominion over us. We can then contemplate them in their real forms, stript of that false glare with which they are apt to dazzle our eyes and mislead our understandings. We then plainly see, how little they can boast of intrinsic worth, how much they owe to the warmth of fancy, the tumult of passion, the ardor of pursuit, and the hurry of the world. For as these causes no longer operate in the stillness of retirement, every charm that they bestowed drops off, and vanishes with them; the objects of our pursuit shrink to their proper dimensions; and we are amazed to see them reduced in an instant almost to nothing, and so little left of all that we gazed at with so much admiration, and followed with so much eagerness.

II. If at the same time that we recede from this world we turn our eyes upon the next, we shall reap a double advantage from our self-communion. By frequently meditating on the concerns of eternity, we shall begin to perceive their reality, and at last to feel their influence. Spiritual meditations are at first very irksome and disagreeable, not because they are unnatural, but because they are unusual. Give but the soul a little respite, a moment's breathing, from the incessant importunity of cares and pleasures, and she

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will almost naturally raise herself towards that heavenly country, where she hopes at last to find rest and happiness. Every faculty and power, both of the body and mind, are perfected by use; and it is by the same means that the eye of faith is also strengthened, and taught to carry its views to the remotest futurity. By degrees we shall learn to allow for the distances of *spiritual*, as we do every day for those of *sensible*, objects; and, by long attention to their greatness, forget or disregard their remoteness, and see them in their full size and proportion. A taste for religious meditations will grow upon us every day; and, by constant perseverance, we shall so refine our sentiments and purify our affections, as to become what the Scriptures call *spiritually minded;* to live, as it were, out of the body; and to walk by faith as steadily and as surely as we used to do by sight.

III. Nothing is so apt to wear off that reverence of virtue, and abhorrence of vice, with which all well-principled men enter *into* the world, as a constant commerce *with* the world. If we have had the happiness of a good education, our first judgments of men and things are generally right. We detest all appearance of baseness, artifice, and hypocrisy; we love every thing that is fair, open, honest, and generous. But how seldom does it happen, that we carry these sentiments along with us, and act in conformity to them, through life? How seldom does it happen, that we are proof against the freedom of conversation, or the contagion of example, which insensibly corrupt the simplicity of our hearts, and distort the uprightness of our opinions. We are aware, perhaps, of the open attacks upon our virtue, which every one may see, and guard against, if he pleases; but it is not every one that sees those more secret enemies, that are perpetually at work, undermining his integrity. It is scarce possible to be always with the multitude, without falling in with its sentiments, and following it to do evil, though we never intended it. The crowd carries us involuntarily forward, without our seeming to take one step ourselves in the way that they are going.

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We learn, by degrees, to think with less abhorrence on what we see every day practised and applauded. We learn to look on bad examples with complacency; and it is but too easy a transition, from seeing vice without disgust, to practising it without remorse. We quickly find out the art of accommodating our duty to our interests, and making our opinions bend to our inclinations. We lose sight of the honest notions we first set out with, and adopt others more pliant in their stead. The issues of life thus corrupted, the infection soon spreads itself to our actions. We are enslaved by habits, without feeling the chain thrown over us, and become guilty of crimes, which we once could not think of without shuddering. It is therefore, of the last consequence, to step aside sometimes from the world, in order to compare our present way of thinking and acting with our past; to try and sift ourselves thoroughly; "to search out our spirits, and seek the "very ground of our hearts; to prove and examine "our thoughts; to look well, extremely well, if there "be any way of wickedness in us; that if there be, we "may turn from it into the way everlasting."

IV. As by frequently conversing with a man, we may gain a tolerable insight into his true temper and disposition; so a repeated communion with our own hearts brings us intimately and entirely acquainted with them; discovers to us their weak sides, their leading propensities, and ruling foibles. It lays open to us all their windings and recesses, their frauds and subtleties. We penetrate through the thin covering of their fair pretences, into their real motives. We see, that in most cases it is hazardous to indulge their suggestions too easily and too often; we see, that one compliance only paves the way for a second, till we have it no longer in our power to refuse their solicitations. Hence we learn to be jealous of their encroachments, and to suspect their most specious proposals. We keep a strict eye over all their motions, and guard every issue of life with the utmost diligence. By tracing the progress of our passion on former occasions,

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and observing the fatal mischiefs that followed from suffering them to gain the ascendancy over us, we shall learn the proper art of managing and subduing them; we shall acquire that extremely necessary science of self-government, those admirable habits of prudence and circumspection, which, however by some men neglected and despised, we shall find to be exceedingly conducive to right conduct and real happiness. Without thus reflecting on our past miscarriages, and enquiring into their causes, we must for ever fall into the same mistakes, be deceived by the same appearances, surprized by the same artifices, and lose the only consolation (poor as it is) which our past follies and transgressions can afford us, *experience*.

Such are the more general uses of religous retirement and reflection: but they will have more peculiar advantages, according to the peculiar situation that we are placed in.

If Providence has cast our lot in a fair ground, has given us a goodly heritage, and blessed us with a large proportion of every thing that is held most valuable in this world, rank, power, wealth, beauty, health, and strength; though we may then, perhaps, be less *disposed*, yet have we more *occasion* for self-communion than ever. Reflection will, at that time, be particularly needful, to check the extravagance of our joy; to preserve us from vanity and self-conceit; to keep our pampered appetites in subjection; to guard us from the dangers of prosperity and the temptations of luxury, from dissipation and debauchery, from pride and insolence, from that wanton cruelty and incredible hardness of heart, which high spirits and uninterrupted happiness too often produce. Instead of these wild excesses, religious meditation will turn the overflowings of our gladness into their proper channels, into praises and thanksgivings to the gracious Author of our happiness, and a liberal communication to others of the blessings we enjoy; which are the only proper expressions of our thankfulness, and the only suitable return for such distinguishing marks of the divine favor.

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If, on the contrary, we are oppressed with a multitude of sorrows, with poverty or disease, with losses and disappointments, the persecution of enemies, or the unkindness of friends, it is to *retirement* we must fly for consolation; not to indulge ourselves in the sullen satisfaction of a secret melancholy, much less to vent the bitterness of our heart in frantic exclamations, and indecent reflections on the dispensations of Providence; but after pouring out our souls before God, to go at once to the bottom of the evil, to search for the causes of our affliction where they are too often, alas! to be found, but where we very seldom think of looking for them, in the follies and miscarriages of our own conduct. And if we are so happy as to discover, and so wise as to correct them, we shall then have fulfilled the end which these sorrows were probably designed to answer, and "it will be even good for us to have been "in trouble."

How absolutely necessary recollection is to those who are immersed in vice, is too obvious to be insisted on. If, indeed, they have cast off all thoughts of Religion, and are determined to sin on to the last, they are then in the right of it to avoid this self-communion, and to decline all conversation with a friend that might tell them very disagreeable truths. Their only business is then, not to encourage, but to stifle, reflection; and, after forgetting their Maker, and every thing they ought to remember, to forget themselves too, if they can. But if they are touched with a sense of their danger, and a desire of amendment, their first step is certainly to retire and recollect themselves. This, indeed, in general, is all that is necessary. "I called "mine own ways to remembrance," says David; and immediately adds, as an almost necessary consequence, and "turned my feet unto thy testimonies." "I made "haste, and prolonged not the time to keep thy com-"mandments." This must ever be the result of a serious deliberation. The truths of Religion, more especially of the Christian Religion, are so clear and convincing; the contrast between vice and virtue, good

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and evil, so striking; the disproportion between a moment of pleasure and an eternity of pain, so glaring and undeniable; that they want nothing more than consideration to give them their proper weight, insomuch, that to think is to believe and to be saved.

To such as are already entered on the paths of virtue, but are yet at a great distance from Christian perfection, it will be highly useful to stop sometimes, and consider what they have already done, and what they have still to do; sometimes, to prevent despair, by looking back on the dangers they have past, and sometimes to excite vigilance, by looking forwards to those before them; to renew, from time to time, their petitions to the Throne of Grace, for that succor and assistance which is so necessary to support them; and above all, to refresh their hopes and invigorate their resolutions, by frequently looking up to that crown of glory, which will so amply recompence all their labors.

Nor does even the highest degree of perfection that human nature can arrive at, place a man above the necessity of calling his ways to remembrance. Nay, perhaps, recollection is then peculiarly necessary, because we are apt to think it least so. "Let him that "thinketh he stands, take heed lest he fall." No sooner do we *suppose* ourselves out of the reach of danger, than we cease to be so. It becomes us, therefore, to be jealous of our very virtues, and to let our vigilance and circumspection keep pace with our improvements. Our condition in this life is represented in Scripture as a continual warfare; and we have a very subtle adversary to deal with, who is always upon the watch to take advantage of our security. The good soldier of Christ, therefore, will use the same caution in his spiritual as he would in his temporal warfare; he will observe the same discipline after a victory, as when success was dubious; for no stratagem has been so often practised, and has so often succeeded, as that of surprizing a victorious, and therefore unguarded enemy.

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It must be observed too, that virtue as well as knowledge is progressive, and if we do not gain ground, we lose it. There is always some perfection to be acquired, or some imperfection to be amended. If we are not constantly strengthening the barriers opposed to our passions, by successively accumulating one good principle upon another, they will grow weaker every day, and expose us to the hazard of some sudden and violent overthrow. It is astonishing how much the very best men find to do, even when they are regular and punctual in reviewing their conduct; how many errors they have to rectify, how many omissions to supply, how many excesses to retrench, how many growing desires to control. The more frequently they do this, the more they will see the necessity and feel the advantage of it. They will have the pleasure too of observing, how much they increase in goodness and grow in grace, and this will animate them to still higher attainments. They will never think themselves sufficiently advanced in holiness; but "forgetting those "things that are behind, and reaching forth to those "things that are before, they will go on from strength "to strength, and press forward towards the mark, to "the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*."

Universally, therefore, to every person, in every condition of life, in every stage of his spiritual progress, frequent SELF-COMMUNION is an indispensable duty. If we are accountable beings, and that we are, not only the Sacred Writings declare, but our faculties, our feelings, our consciences, irresistibly prove to us; if we cannot, without the utmost hazard, go on at random, as appetite prompts or accident leads us; if every step we take in our moral conduct must bring us nearer to heaven or to hell; surely it behoves us to call our ways seriously and frequently to remembrance; to consider them with the utmost care and circumspection, and observe where they terminate, and to what point they will carry us. Should we find ourselves in the right way, we shall have the satisfaction

* Phil. iii. 13. Psalm lxxxiv. 7.

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of going on in the consciousness of *being* right, and of acting well upon principle. Should we have departed widely from the path of our duty, it will be high time for us to return to it, lest we go too far to retreat, and rush thoughtlessly forward into irretrievable destruction. If we have deviated but slightly, we shall prevent this deviation from growing insensibly wider, and regain the ground we have lost with little trouble or pain. In many things we offend all, even the very best of us; and it is far more wise and prudent to find out these offences by reflection, and to correct them by suitable resolutions, than to let them accumulate by neglect, till some fatal mischief awake us to a sense of our duty, or the stroke of death render it no longer practicable. This single consideration, the possibility of being called, even the healthiest and the youngest of us, suddenly and unexpectedly called, to give an account of ourselves to God, before we have properly settled that account, is of itself enough to make us reflect on our condition, and to do it also without delay. We see almost every day of our lives the most striking and affecting instances of our precarious condition. We see our friends and neighbors suddenly snatched away from us, at a time when we (perhaps they too) least expected it. We see multitudes of others drop around us, one by one, till we are left almost alone in a wide world, deserted by all those whom we most intimately knew and esteemed. Yet all this seems to make little or no impression upon us. We follow our acquaintances to the grave; we drop, perhaps, a few parting, unavailing tears over them, and then return again to the cares, the pleasures, the follies and the vices, of the world, with as much eagerness and alacrity as if nothing at all had happened that in the least concerned ourselves; as if there was not the least chance or possibility, that the danger, which we see so near us, should at last come home to us. But, surely, these convincing, these alarming proofs of our mortality, ought to have a little more effect on our hearts. When we see thousands fall beside us, and ten thou-

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sands at our right hand, we ought to reflect, that *our* turn may, perhaps, be next; that, at the very best, we have no time to lose, and that it highly behoves us to call our ways immediately to remembrance; to make haste, (for death will not wait for us) to make haste, and prolong not the time, to keep God's commandments. When, in short, we consider the extreme uncertainty of life, and the absolute certainty of appearing before our Judge in the very same state in which that life is taken away from us, with all our sins and all our infirmities to answer for, we can never consent to trust our all on so precarious a bottom, nor to let our most important concerns lie at the mercy of every accident that may befal us. The loss of a year, the loss of a day, may be the loss of Heaven. "Thou "fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee:" This was said for our admonition: and if, under this apprehension, we can calmly lay ourselves down to sleep, without reviewing our conduct or preparing ourselves to wake, as we may do, in another world, it is in vain to use any further exhortations. If an argument so plain, so simple, so forcible, has no influence upon our minds, Reason and Religion can do nothing more for us; our obstinacy is incurable, our danger inexpressible.

From that danger, may God of his infinite mercy preserve us all, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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SERMON XXIII.

1 Sam. xiii. 14.

The Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the Lord hath commanded him to be captain over his people.

*THERE is no need to inform you that the person spoken of in these words is David king of Israel. The appellation of THE MAN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART, is a well-known distinction, which having never been expressly bestowed on any other, has, by long usage, been appropriated solely to him†. The reason of his being so distinguished, is generally presumed to be the excellence of his moral conduct: because a God, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, can never be supposed to delight in it; which it is thought must be the case, if the man after his own heart was in any degree an immoral man. On the strength of this supposition, some mistaken friends of Religion, in order to vindicate God's choice, have thought it necessary to prove David's private character perfectly unexceptionable; and some inveterate enemies of Religion, in order to stigmatize that choice, have taken no less pains to make him appear completely

* This sermon was originally written and preached before the University of Cambridge, in the year 1761, in answer to a profane and licentious pamphlet, which had its day of celebrity and applause among a certain class of readers; but is now, as it deserved to be, and as is the usual fate of such productions, entirely forgot. Those parts of the sermon, therefore, which had a more immediate reference to that publication, are now omitted; and the whole is rendered less polemical and more practical, and of course, it is hoped, more generally useful.

† Yet appellations of nearly the same import have been applied to others. See below, pp. 102, 3, 4, &c.

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detestable. But both the one and the other seem to me to have mistaken the case, and misapplied their labor. It was not, I conceive, for the unblemished sanctity of his life, but for reasons of a very different nature, that King David was distinguished by the honorable title assigned to him in the text.

It is, I believe universally allowed, that the chief design of God in separating the Jewish nation from the rest of mankind, was to perpetuate the knowledge of himself by means of this peculiar people, and to preserve the worship of the one true God amidst an idolatrous world. This was the grand foundation of the whole Jewish polity; the main purport of their laws; the principle of all God's dealings towards them. Whoever, therefore, exerted himself vigorously and effectually in promoting this great end of the Jewish theocracy, might, with the strictest propriety, be called a man after God's own heart; because he acted in conformity to the main purpose of God's heart: he did the very thing that God wanted to have done; he forwarded the grand design that he had in view. Now this was preceisely the character of David, the distinguishing excellence of his life. He was a sincere and hearty lover of his country, a zealous observer of its laws, in opposition to all idolatry, from which he ever kept himself and his people at the utmost distance*. It was not therefore, on account of his *private virtues*, but his *public conduct*; nor for a spotless purity of manners, but for his abhorrence of idolatry, and his strict adherence to the civil and religious† laws of his country, that David was honored with the name of the man after God's own heart‡. If any Christian writers

* See Le Clerc on Acts xiii. 22; Patrick on 1 Kings xv. 3, 5.

† One remarkable instance of David's scrupulous observance of the law, in punctually complying with the prohibition given in Deut. xvii. 16. against the use of cavalry in war, see in Bishop SHERLOCK on Prophecy, Diss. 4, p. 370—375. And perhaps his invariable obedience to this important law, "which was to be a standing trial of prince and people, whether they had "trust and confidence in God their deliverer," might contribute not a little towards procuring him this so much envied distinction.

‡ It is certain that Abraham was called THE FRIEND OF GOD, (a distinction no less remarkable than king David's) for the reasons here assigned; for his adhering to the belief and worship of the one true God, in op-

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have supposed that this title was the mark of *moral perfection*, and in consequence of that have exalted David's character into a standard of virtue, they have, with a very good meaning perhaps, done a very injudicious thing. The explanation here given seems most agreeable to the language of the Scriptures, to the general tenor of David's conduct, to the nature of the Jewish dispensation, and the intentions of its Divine Author.

To what has been urged in favor of this interpretation, by a very eminent writer*, may be added, that though David is in this single passage called a man after God's own heart; yet it is afterwards only said of *Him*, in common with several other kings, that he "did "that which was right in the eyes of the Lord†;" which expression seems intended to convey, and indeed naturally does convey, the same meaning as the other. For it will not be easy to point out a difference betwixt acting "according to any one's heart," and doing that which "is right in his eyes." By determining therefore the signification of this phrase, we shall arrive at the true value of that made use of in the text. Now the expression of "doing that which is right in the eyes "of the Lord," is constantly and uniformly applied to those, who were eminent not so much for their virtues in a private, as their zeal in a regal capacity; for their aversion to idolatry, and scrupulous observance of the law. Thus, when it is said of Asa‡, that he did that which was "good and right in the eyes of the Lord," the reason assigned for it is, "because he took away "the altars of the strange gods, and the high places, "and brake down the images, and cut down the groves; "and commanded Judah to seek the Lord God of their "fathers, and to do the law and the commandment." Not a word of his moral character, though from his doing that which was not only right but good, one might

position to the idolatrous nations amongst whom he lived. See Clarke's Sermons, vol. ii. Disc. 38. p. 50. Dublin edition, 1751, and Le Clerc on Gen. vi. 9.

* See Divine Legation of Moses, vol. iii. b. 4. s. 6. p. 354. 3d edit.

† 1 Kings xv. 5. ‡ 2 Chron. xiv. 2, 3, 4.

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naturally have expected it. Again, when we are told that Solomon's heart was not *perfect* with the Lord his God; that he went not *fully* after the Lord as did David his father; the proof alleged is, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods*. Whence it evidently appears, that the *perfection* of David's heart consisted principally in his inviolable attachment to the worship of the true God, from which he never deviated or turned aside, "either to the right hand or to "the left."

If this explanation be, as it appears to be, conformable to truth and Scripture, the following very useful consequences do naturally and immediately flow from it.

I. That, in order to vindicate God's choice of "a "man after his own heart," or the truth of the Scriptures in relating it, there is no necessity to prove his moral conduct *faultless*, or to obviate all the accusations which have been brought against him; because this choice having proceeded on other principles, his private conduct is foreign to the question†.

II. That we cannot draw conclusions in favor of any crime, so as to justify it in ourselves, from its having been committed by a "man after God's own heart." Because, though his conformity to the divine will in some very material instances, did justly entitle him to that appellation; yet every vicious excess was in *him* (as it must be in every human creature) the object of God's utter detestation, and very often too of his severest vengeance.

III. That they who have taken so much pains to ridicule and vilify the character of David, with a view of

* 1 Kings xi. 4.

† It has been observed, that David's moral character seems to be pronounced faultless, (1 Kings xv. 5.) except in the matter of Uriah. We reply, that the Scripture in this (as in many other places) must necessarily be understood to speak only in *general*; intimating, that king David's conduct was, in the *main*, good and right; and though he might be guilty of other faults, yet none of them were so gross and enormous, so directly repugnant to the *express commands* of God, as this; and therefore not so necessary to be pointed out, and particularly distinguished. Whoever is well acquainted with the Scripture phraseology must allow, that it not only admits, but perpetually requires, such restrictions as this. See Matt. v. 48, and Clarke's Sermons, vol. ii. p. 404. and vol. v. p. 61. Dublin edition, 8vo. 1751.

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wounding the authority of the Scriptures through his sides, have only shown their malevolence, without effecting their purpose. Because their whole reasoning being founded on a presumption, that David was selected by God, on account of some peculiar moral excellency; this foundation being withdrawn, the whole superstructure of cavils and calumnies raised upon it falls entirely to the ground.

Let it not, however, be inferred from any thing here said, that king David's character ought, by any means, to be viewed in that odious light in which these writers have endeavored to place it. For although it must be confessed, that his moral conduct is far from being irreproachable, yet it is no less true, that (excepting those known and acknowledged crimes, which no one pretends to palliate or deny, and which he himself deplored with the deepest penitence and contrition) every stain which has with so much malevolent industry been thrown upon his name, may be, to a great degree, if not completely, done away. It is not my design to enter here into a particular confutation of all the calumnies and accusations which have been brought against him. It would not be suitable to the nature, or reducible to the usual bounds of a discourse of this kind. But as the heaviest, and, indeed, the only plausible charge, which has been urged, not only against David, but the whole Jewish nation, is that of cruelty, a charge which, without any of those exaggerations it has received, is of itself apt to make the deepest impressions on the honestest minds; for these reasons, I shall suggest a few considerations in regard to this particular; which may serve to put the unwary a little upon their guard, to remove all unnecessary and invidious aggravations, and account, in some measure, for what, perhaps, can neither be wholly justified nor excused.

We who live in these enlightened and polished times, when our manners are softened by the liberal arts, and our souls humanized by the benevolent spirit of Christianity, are shocked beyond measure at many things, which, in the ruder ages of antiquity, were not looked

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upon with so much abhorrence as they deserve. We cannot help bringing those transactions home to ourselves, referring them to our own age and nation, supposing them to be done under the same advantages which we at present enjoy, and consequently as involving the same degree of guilt that we ourselves should incur by the commission of the same crimes. But though this is a very natural, it is by no means an equitable way of judging. In deciding on the merit or demerit of any men, or society of men, in a remote period, we ought certainly to take into consideration the general character of the times in which they lived, the peculiar modes of thinking, and rules of acting, which then prevailed. If we apply this observation to king David, we shall find, that he lived in an age when the world was sunk in ignorance and barbarity; when men were divided into a number of petty kingdoms, and small communities; when they shut themselves up in "fenced cities," and seldom went out of them but to fight with their neighbors; for every neighbor was of course an enemy.* Scarce any other art was then known but the art of war, which consisted in destroying as many as they possibly could, and enslaving the rest. In such a state of things it must necessarily follow, that men familiarized to blood, and trained up to slaughter, would become insensibly steeled against the impressions of humanity, and contract a habit of cruelty, which would give a tinge to the whole current of their lives, impart even to the face of peace itself too sanguine a complexion, and discolor the whole intercourse of civil, social, and domestic offices. We are not then to wonder, that the Jews themselves were infected with this epidemical ferocity of manners. We are not to charge them with more than their share of the common guilt, we are not to represent them as people *distinguished* by their cruelty, but as constituting a consistent part of a barbarous world.

* The state of our own kingdom under the SAXON heptarchy, may, perhaps, give us some faint idea of the barbarity of all kingdoms in the early ages of the world.

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It may be thought, perhaps, that though this way of reasoning is to be admitted in general, yet it has not the same force in regard to the Jews as when applied to any other nation; because they being God's chosen and peculiar people, ought to be found superior in benevolence, as well as every other virtue, to the rest of mankind. But it must ever be remembered, (what God himself frequently declares*,) that it was not for their "own sakes," for their "own righteousness," that they were chosen, but (as in the particular case of king David above stated) for other reasons; for preserving the knowledge, and promoting the worship, of the one true God; for manifesting his divine power in working miracles, and for executing his judgments on those impenitent nations, whose enormous wickedness was then ripe for vengeance. The moral goodness therefore of the Jews being no peculiar object of God's choice, we are not on that account merely to expect from them any uncommon degrees of virtue, or any exemption from the reigning vices of their age.

Nay, so little reason have we to expect any extraordinary instances of humanity from the peculiarity of their circumstances, that this very peculiarity might, without great care and circumspection, have been apt to give an unfavorable turn to their disposition. The distinction bestowed upon them, though not in reality for their own merit, yet in preference to the rest of the world, was not unlikely to inspire them with too high an opinion of themselves, and too contemptible a one of others. Their exclusion from a free and general intercourse with the surrounding nations, (though absolutely necessary for the most important purposes) might, however, tend to contract their notions and confine their benevolence. That extreme abhorrence in which they very justly held the vices of their neighbors, might sometimes exceed the bounds of virtuous indignation: and that unhappy, though necessary, task imposed upon them, of destroying the sinful nations of Canaan, might too easily lead them to transgress the laws of humanity on less justifiable occasions. If, un-

* Deut. ix. 4, 5.

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der these circumstances, the Jews were not more inhuman than their neighbors, they certainly deserve some praise; if they were, there are, you see, many mitigating pleas in their favor; and the blame will not rest, either on the temper of the people, or the temper of their religion.

It has, I know, been frequently asserted, that the cruelty of the Jews exceeded that of any other people, not only of their own times, but in any age of the world. This, however, has been much more confidently advanced than clearly proved. From what little we can learn of the nations cotemporary with the Jews, in the early periods of their history, there is not the least reason to imagine, that they were of a more merciful disposition; and if we hear less of their cruelty, it is because we know less of their history*. What renders this extremely probable is, that in much later ages, when the minds of men were greatly softened and subdued by the improvements of civil life, we meet with much less real, though more ostentatious, humanity than amongst the Jews; and I believe there are very few here, whose recollection will not readily supply them with repeated instances of cruelty, in the most flourishing periods of the most civilized Heathens, which far surpass any that can be produced from the most sanguinary transactions of the Jewish people†.

Whatever were the inhumanities of the Israelites, they had not, however, that aggravation, with which

* From the horrid custom which we know prevailed amongst the Canaanites of sacrificing their children to their idols, we may rationally presume, that the Jews were much outdone in acts of barbarity by their neighbors.

† Several acts of cruelty which have been ascribed to King David and the Jewish people, appear, on a more accurate examination, to have been grounded on an incorrect translation of particular passages of the Old Testament. Thus it is said, 2 Sam. xii. 31. that when Rabbah (the capital city of the Ammonites) was taken, "David brought forth the people that "were therein, and put them under saws and under harrows of iron, and "under axes of iron, and made them pass through the brick-kilns." Hence it is inferred, that he put them to death with the most exquisite and unheard of torments. But it has been shown by several learned critics, that our version of this place would have been more accurate, and more strictly conformable to the original, if it had rendered the passage thus: He put them *to* saws and *to* harrows of iron, and *to* axes of iron, and made them pass *by* or *to* the brick-kilns: that is, he put them to hard labor, with the tools and in the places here specified. See Mr. Ormerod's Remarks on Dr. Priestley's Disquisitions, &c. 2d ed. p. 72.

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those of the Pagans were frequently attended, that of being exercised on their own countrymen, their most faithful dependents, their nearest relations, and dearest friends. The proofs of their cruelty are principally, if not wholly, taken from their treatment of the idolatrous nations around them. But when we reflect, that the laws of nature, and the rights of nations, were not then so clearly ascertained as they have since been; that wars were then waged on savage, unrelenting, exterminating principles; and that those nations which felt the weight of their heaviest vengeance, were not only their avowed and inveterate enemies, but so incorrigible and abominably flagitious* as to call aloud for punishment, of which the Jews were only instruments in the hand of the Almighty; it will be easily seen, that such proofs are by no means pertinent and satisfactory. The truth is, these transient and casual instances of cruelty, though they are such as at first sight must necessarily strike and offend us most, yet are not so proper to determine a national character, and denominate a people constitutionally barbarous, as those *established* and *permanent* maxims of internal and domestic cruelty, which never existed in the Jewish government, but were universally received and practised, were encouraged by the laws, and applauded by the historians, of those very nations, who esteemed and called all others in respect of themselves barbarians. It is these, which, though less insisted on by writers, and less attended to by readers, are yet more repugnant to humanity, more destructive to the species, and more characteristic and decisive evidences of a malevolent spirit, than those accidental outrages and excesses, on which historians generally lavish all the horrors of description†.

* See a detail of their execrable vices, Lev. xviii.

† There is scarce any author, ancient or modern, who has inveighed with such indiscriminate and unmeasured rancor against the whole Jewish nation, as M. Voltaire. There are few of his latter prose publications in which he has not introduced this unfortunate people, for the purpose of loading them with reproach or ridicule. But his zeal sometimes outruns his prudence and his regard to truth, and instead of exciting the indignation of mankind against them, turns it upon himself. Among numberless instances in this sort, I shall only single out one. In his *Dictionaire Philosophique, Art. An-*

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I am aware, indeed, that the extirpation of the Canaanites was enjoined by the Mosaical laws, and that the Jews were forbid by no less than Divine authority to show them any mercy or compassion. This is true; and at the same time very consistent with a dispensation in the main benevolent. For when we consider God in the light he should always, with respect to those times, be considered in, not only as the common Governor of all mankind, but as the more immediate Ruler and Legislator of the Jewish nation; and as enforcing obedience to his authority, amongst the Jews in particular, amongst all nations in some measure, by temporal punishments and rewards; it was no more a violation of mercy in him to enact, or in them to execute, such a penal law against the Canaanites, than it would be in a Prince to punish his rebellious subjects by the hands of his faithful ones, or in them to inflict that punishment. Such examples of severity are necessary to the very being of a state, and serve at once to repress the insolence of the wicked, and to secure the obedience of the good*.

thropophages, he informs us, that from the time of Ezekiel the Jews must have been in the habit of eating human flesh; because that prophet assures them, that if they will defend themselves courageously against the King of Persia, they shall not only eat the *horses* of their enemies, but the *horsemen and the warriors themselves*. How will the reader be astonished, (if he is not a little acquainted with the character and manner of M. Voltaire) when, on looking into Ezekiel, he finds, that the whole of this is a complete fabrication; and that it is not the *Jews*, but the *ravenous birds* and the *beasts of the field*, who, in the bold and figurative language of Prophecy, are called upon "to eat the flesh of the mighty, and drink the blood of the princes "of the earth." Ezek. xxxix. 4, 17, 18, &c.

It is a great pity that this lively writer did not, for his own credit, pay a little more regard to the sage advice of a friend, who knew him and his pratices well, the late King of Prussia. That prince in one of his letters to him, alluding to a certain well-known transaction of Voltaire's with a Jewish merchant, which his majesty calls a *vile business*, (and which, perhaps, might be one reason of this author's implacable enmity to the whole nation) says to him, "I hope you will have no more quarrels either with the "Old Testament or the New. Such contests are dishonorable: and though "possessed of more genius than any man in France, you cannot avoid fi"nally injuring your reputation by the disgrace of such conduct." *Posthumous Works of Fred.* II. vol. vii. lett. 243, p. 402.

The Jews, however, have met with a very able and eloquent defender in the author of *Lettres de quelques Juifs, Portugais, &. Allemands, a M. de Voltaire*. Paris, 1769.—See also Div. Leg. vol. iv. b. 5. s. 1. p 139.

* The absolute necessity of extirpating the Canaanites, or at least destroying their national polity; the peculiar propriety of doing this by the sword of

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If this exception be, as it certainly ought to be, admitted, and if we make such other equitable allowances, as the state of Religion and the state of Society, at that time, do necessarily require; the Mosaical law will, I am persuaded, appear infinitely superior, in point of humanity, to all the institutions of the most celebrated lawgivers of antiquity. It abounds with injunctions of mercy and pity, not only to Jews, but to strangers, to enemies, and even to those who had most cruelly and injuriously oppressed them. "If "thy brother be waxen poor and fallen in decay with "thee; then thou shalt relieve him; yea, though he "be a stranger or a sojourner, that he may live with "thee. Take thou no usury of him, or increase; but "fear thy God, that thy brother may live with thee. "Thou shalt not oppress a stranger. Thou shalt love "him as thyself. Thou shalt not abhor an Edomite: "thou shalt not abhor an Ægyptian. If thou meet "thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt "surely bring it back to him." The dispositions in favor of the poor are truly singular and amiable. "Thou shalt not harden thy heart, nor shut thy hand "from thy poor brother; but thou shalt open thy "hand wide unto him; and shall surely lend him suf- "ficient for his need. When ye reap the harvest of "your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of "thy field; neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of "thy harvest; and if thou have forgot a sheaf in the "field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it; and when "thou beatest thine olive-tree, thou shalt not go over "the boughs again; when thou gatherest the grapes "of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it afterwards; "it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the "widow*." The provisions made for the security

the Jews; the great and benevolent purposes that were answered by their separation from the world; the advantages that *all other nations* derived from it; and many other particulars of the divine economy with regard to this extraordinary people; see clearly and ably explained in *Bishop Law's Considerations on the Theory of Religion*, from p. 82. to p. 98. 3d edit.

Vide Butler's Analogy, part ii. ch. 3. p. 267. 4th edit. 1750.

* Lev. xxv. 35, 36. Ex. xxiii. 9. Lev. xix. 34. Deut. xxiii. 7. Ex. xxii. 4. Deut. xv. 7, 8. Lev. xix. 9, 10. Deut. xxiv. 19.

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and comfort of that most useful, though too often most wretched, part of the species, slaves and servants, are entirely worthy of a law that came down from Heaven. That absolute and unlimited power over the lives of slaves indulged to their tyrannical masters by almost all Heathen lawgivers, a power most scandalously abused to the disgrace of all humanity, was effectualy restrained by the Jewish law, which punished the murder of a slave with the utmost rigor*. The kindness enjoined towards hired servants is most remarkable. "Thou "shalt not oppress a hired servant that is poor and "needy; whether he be of thy brethren or of thy "strangers that are in the land within thy gates. At "his day thou shalt give him his hire; neither shall "the sun go down upon it; for he is poor and set-"teth his heart upon it† Thou shalt not rule over "thy brother with rigor‡." The injunctions respecting Hebrew slaves were no less merciful. "If "thy brother, a Hebrew man, or a Hebrew woman, "be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years, in the "seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee; "and thou shalt not let him go away empty; but thou "shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out "of thy floor, and out of thy wine press: and of that "wherewith the Lord thy God hath blessed thee, thou "shalt give unto him‖." It should seem also, as if all other bondmen or slaves (even those that were captured in war or brought from the neighboring Heathen nations) were to be emancipated in the year of the Jubilee; that is, every fiftieth year: for it is said *universally*, "Ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim "*liberty* throughout *all* the land, to *all* the inhabitants "thereof¶." The utmost care, in short, is taken throughout to guard against every species of tyranny

* Ex. xxi. 20. † Deut. xxiv. 14. 15. ‡ Lev. xxv. 43.

‖ Deut. xv. 12, 13. Other instances of this humanity in the Jewish law, may be seen in Deut. xxii. 6. 8. xxiv. 5, 6, 12, 13, to the end. Rosseau himself (*Emile*, lib. 5. p. 6.) commends the benevolent spirit of the law mentioned Ex. xxii. 26, 27. See also on this point the ancient part of the Universal History, vol. iii. 8vo, p. 136, note b. and p. 152.

¶ Lev. xxx. 10.

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and oppression, and to protect the helpless and weak from the wanton insolence of prosperity and power. The tenderness of the divine legislature thought no creature below its notice; and extended itself to the minutest articles of social and domestic life, which, though unnoticed by less benevolent lawgivers, do, in fact, constitute a very great and essential part of human happiness and misery.

With such heavenly institutions as these (which we shall in vain look for in any Pagan government) is every page of the Jewish law replete. It is from these we are to form our judgment of the Jews, of their Religion, and its Divine Author*; and if these had their proper effect on the manners of the people, they must have produced upon the whole a constant and habitual (though, perhaps, from the very nature of their situation, a confined) benevolence, much superior, not only to that of their rude cotemporaries, but to the boasted lenity of much later and more polished nations.

It will be readily understood, that every thing which has been here said to vindicate the Jewish nation in general from the charge of *distinguished cruelty*, is applicable to King David in particular. But he may also lay claim to some peculiar indulgence from the singularity of his own circumstances, which were frequently very unfavorable to humanity. It was his fortune to pass through almost every scene of life, and to meet with almost every incident in his way, that could be injurious to his temper, or give an edge to his resentments. Extremes of happiness or misery, sudden transitions from the one to the other, the persecutions of enemies, and the unkindness of friends, are cir-

* A consideration of the general temper and disposition of law will be found of great advantage to civil life; and will supply us with very useful theory. It is reaching the heart in the first instance, and making ourselves masters of the genius of a whole people at once, by reading them in that glass which represents them best, the turn of their civil institutions. There is scarce a passage in all antiquity more happily imagined, than that where Demosthenes tells us, that the laws of a country were considered as the morals of a state, and the character of a whole people taken collectively. *Dr. Taylor's Elements of Civil Law*, 2d edit. p. 160.

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cumstances which seldom fail of hurting the mind, and vitiating the most benevolent disposition. All these did David experience in quick succession, and in their fullest extent.

He was originally nothing more than a shepherd; and at a time when his youth and inexperience seemed to disqualify him for any more important business than that of feeding a flock, he broke out at once the champion and preserver of his country. Transplanted on a sudden from a cottage to a court, he experienced alternately the smiles and the frowns of a capricious monarch; was sometimes flattered with the hope of being united to him by the closest bonds of affinity, and sometimes in danger of being struck by him with a javelin to the wall. Driven at length from his presence, and torn from the arms of those he loved, "his "soul was hunted from city to city;" and after suffering the last distresses of human nature, he was not only restored to the honors he had lost, but seated on the throne of Israel. And here, though surrounded with all the pleasures and magnificence of an Eastern monarch, yet was he at the same time not only harassed with the common uneasinesses of life, and the cares inseparable from royalty, but experienced a succession of the bitterest sufferings and the heaviest domestic calamities; was once more driven from Jerusalem, deserted by his friends, cursed by his enemies, and persecuted by his darling son; whose death did indeed put a period to his public calamities, but plunged him in the deepest affliction, and was very near bringing down his grey hairs with sorrow to the grave.

When to these private considerations we add those more general ones above-mentioned, we can hardly be surprized at any excesses of severity that King David occasionally gave way to. We shall rather be surprized to find, in so tumultuous and military a kind of life, many striking instances of humanity, many amiable tendernesses, many uncommon and heroical exertions of generosity, which plainly indicated a temper constitutionally good and right, but laboring under

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the weight of numberless disadvantages, which sometimes dragged it from its true bias, and forced it to take a turn directly opposite to its natural bent. His circumstances exposed him to a variety of injuries and insults; the liveliness of his sensations made him feel them, the impetuosity of his passions made him resent them, too strongly. And yet, though every thing thus concurred to stimulate his revenge, though the guilt of indulging it was not then so apparent and so acknowledged as it now is, yet did he, on one memorable occasion, resist the strongest impulses of this importunate and ungovernable passion, though tempted to gratify it by the most inviting opportunity on his inveterate enemy, whose past conduct would almost have justified any extremity; and whose removal would not only have put an immediate end to his distresses, but, in all appearance, opened his way to the attainment of his utmost wishes, and raised him at once from an exile to a king*.

It is but justice also to add, that this prince had a sensibility of soul, which, though it gave too keen an edge both to his relish of pleasure and his resentment of injury, yet gave at the same time an uncommon fervor to his repentance, a peculiar vigor and vivacity to all his virtues; rendered him most feelingly alive to the noblest and the tenderest sentiments; and inspired him with every liberal and social affection that can warm the human breast. "O Absalom, my son, my son," are words that will go to every parent's heart that has experienced the same misfortune, and speak to it with a force and eloquence that has never yet been equalled. He had, moreover, as his inimitable writings abundantly testify, a most ardent spirit of devotion, and a boundless zeal for the honor of God and the interests of his Religion; and the general tenor of his conduct, when left to its own natural course, very clearly evinced, that he was, upon the whole, a conscious observer and a strenuous asserter of the Divine laws, a most disinter-

* 1 Sam. xxiv. Vide Peters on Job, p. 362.

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ested and active patriot, the tenderest of parents, and the most affectionate of friends.

At the same time, however, that we do justice to the virtues of King David, we must acknowledge and lament his faults, which were undoubtedly great, and in one flagrant instance more especially, justly subject him to the severest reproach. But while we censure him on this account, as he deserves, it will be our wisdom to look well also to ourselves. To the Infidel it is matter of unspeakable triumph, that the man after God's own heart should have been betrayed into such dreadful crimes. But to the Christian it must be a subject of most serious concern and alarm, to observe so striking a proof of the frailty and weakness of human nature, even when strengthened by mature years, and confirmed by early habits of virtue and religion. It holds out to him a most awful lesson, how indispensably necessary it is, even for men of the best dispositions and most exalted piety, to keep their hearts with all diligence; to watch and to guard those passions, which they feel most predominant in their souls, with unremitting vigilance, to the latest period of their lives; and to apply most fervently and frequently for that help from above, which is promised in the Gospel to every sincere believer, and without which our utmost efforts and our firmest resolutions will, in some unguarded and unsuspected moment, give way to the impetuosity of passion, and we shall be unexpectedly plunged into an abyss of guilt and misery.

But, above all things, let us beware of *perverting* the example of David to our own ruin, and of considering his deviations from duty, not as they truly are, a warning to us against danger, but as an encouragement to us to tread in the same unhallowed paths of vice. Let us not flatter ourselves, that because HE, so devout, so religious, so distinguished by the favor of Heaven, was once most fatally seduced into sin, that we may therefore commit the same or similar crimes with impunity. On the contrary, if these crimes appear so odious and detestable, even in a Jewish monarch, who had to

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plead in his excuse (though all excuse was vain) the temptations of a court, the manners of the times, the peculiarity of his own circumstances, and the liberties too often taken by men in his situation; they must assume a much more frightful aspect in a private Christian, who has none of those mitigating pleas to offer, who lives in much more enlightened and civilized times, has much stricter rules of moral conduct presented to him in the Gospel, is called to a much higher degree of purity and holiness, has far more powerful aid from Heaven to support him in his duty, more terrible punishments to work upon his fears, and more glorious rewards to animate his hopes.

Let it be remembered too, that the offences of David were by no means passed over with impunity; that he was severely punished for them by the remorse of his own conscience, by the deep affliction into which they plunged him, by the wretched consequences they drew after them, and by the heavy and positive penalties denounced and inflicted upon him by God himself.

Hear how the repenting monarch bemoans himself in the anguish of his soul, and then say, whether his situation was an enviable one; whether you would *chuse* to imitate his misconduct, and take the consequences.

"Have mercy upon me, O God, after thy great "goodness, according to the multitude of thy mer-"cies do away mine offences. Wash me thorough-"ly from my wickedness, and cleanse me from my "sin; for I acknowledge my fault, and my sin is ever "before me. Make me a clean heart, O God, and "renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away "from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit "from me. Thy rebuke hath broken my heart, I am "full of heaviness; I looked for some to have pity on "me, but there was no man, neither found I any to "comfort me. My God, my God, look upon me: "why hast thou forsaken me, and art so far from my "health and the words of my complaint. I cry in the "day-time, and thou hearest not; and in the night-

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"season also I take no rest. Turn thee unto me, and "have mercy upon me, for I am desolate and in misery. The sorrows of my heart are enlarged, O bring "thou me out of my troubles. Look upon my adversity and misery, and forgive me all my sin. Thine "arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me "sore: for my wickednesses are gone over my head, "and are like a sore burthen, too heavy for me to "bear. I am brought into so great trouble and misery, that I go mourning all the day long. My heart "panteth, my strength faileth, and the sight of mine "eyes is gone from me*."

It is hardly in the power of language to express greater agony of mind than this; and no one, surely, that reads these passages can wish to undergo the misery there described. It is impossible for him, if he is of a sound mind, to make so wretched a bargain for himself, as to plunge voluntarily into the crimes of the royal penitent, that he may afterwards taste the bitter fruits of his contrition and remorse; or, (what is still worse, and what no sinner can be secure against) that he may die without repenting at all, and rush into the unceasing torments of "a worm that never dies, and "a fire that is never quenched."

* Ps. li. lxix. xxv. xxxviii. &c, &c.

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SERMON XXIV.

JAMES i. 27.

Pure religion, and undefiled before God and the Father, is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

IT should seem as if Religion was here made to consist only of two parts; CHARITY or BENEVOLENCE respecting others, and PURITY or SELF-GOVERNMENT respecting ourselves. The first of these, Benevolence, is characterized to us by singling out one of the strongest of our social affections, compassion towards the distressed, which, in the beautiful language of Scripture, is called *visiting*, that is, relieving "the fatherless and widows in their affliction;" a mode of expression very common to the sacred writers; especially when they are describing the virtue of Charity, which is almost constantly represented by one or other of its most striking features.

The other part of Religion, here specified Self-Government, is very distinctly marked out by the phrase of "keeping himself unspotted from the world;" which plainly means a total abstinence from the immoral practices and unlawful pleasures of the world; a strict command over our irregular appetites and passions; an abhorrence of every thing that tends to debase our nature, and contaminate our souls.

But it must immediately occur to every one, that, besides the two branches of Religion here enumerated, there is a third, of which St. James takes no notice.

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And it may appear, at first sight, a little extraordinary, that an Apostle of Christ, when he seems to be giving a formal definition of his Master's Religion, should omit what has ever been esteemed a most essential part of it, *Piety*, or *the love of God*. But, although this duty is not expressly mentioned, yet it is evidently implied, in the text, which recommends such Religion only as terminates ultimately in God, such as is pure and undefiled "before God and the Father." And the reason why St. James did not more particularly insist on this point was, because he had no occasion to press it on the persons to whom he was writing. That acts of piety were necessary, they readily owned; but they were too apt, it seems, to think, that scarce any thing else was necessary; and that, provided they were punctual and exact in their devotional exercises, they might be allowed to relax a little in the government of their passions, and the duties owing to their neighbor. St. James, therefore, pointing the whole force of his admonition against this dangerous error, and passing over those religious observances, on which they were already disposed to pique themselves too much, reminds them in the text, that although God was indeed to be worshipped, yet it was to be not only with their lips, but in their lives; that Religion, that even Devotion itself, did not consist merely in calling upon God's name, but in obeying his laws; in acts of kindness to their fellow-creatures, and an unspotted sanctity of manners.

Let no one, therefore, infer, what some have been too willing to infer, from the passage before us, that an inoffensive, beneficent, and tolerably good moral life, is the *whole* of Religion; and that the love of God constitutes no part of our duty. It is, on the contrary, our principal and most important duty, or, as the Scriptures express it, *the first and great commandment*. And as, without Piety, there can be no Religion, so without belief in the Son of God, there can be evidently no Christianity. Unless our virtue is built on this foundation, unless it be grounded on true evange-

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lical principles, it may be very good Pagan morality, but it is not Christian godliness. And whatever other rewards it may be entitled to, it can have no claim to that eternal one, which is not a matter of right, strictly due to our services, but the free gift of God to those only that embrace the offers of salvation made to them in the Gospel, on the conditions of a right faith, as well as of a right conduct. Yet it has become of late but too common, not only to treat the peculiar doctrines of Christianity with contempt, and to set up practical morality as the sum and substance of all religion; but what is still more extraordinary, men have frequently thought, or pretended to think, that even morality itself was not necessary in all its extent; and that of the two duties mentioned in the text, CHARITY and SELF-GOVERNMENT, it was fully sufficient to cultivate that which best suited their own constitutions or inclinations. Accordingly, they have very seldom paid a due regard to both these at the same time; but slighting each of them in their turn, have persuaded themselves, that the observance of the one would atone for the neglect or violation of the other.

These assertions might very easily be proved by facts; and it would be no unpleasing, nor perhaps unprofitable speculation, to trace the various revolutions that have happened in the opinion and the practice of mankind with regard to these two Christian virtues. But it is sufficient for my present purpose to observe, that as the distinguishing character of our forefathers in the last age was preciseness and severity of manners; we, their descendants, on the contrary, have taken up Benevolence for *our* favorite virtue: and that the same vigor of mind, and national vehemence of temper, which carried them such remarkable lengths in the rugged paths of moral discipline, has with us taken a different direction, and a gayer look; is stirring up all the humane and tender affections within our souls, and urging us on to the noblest exertions of generosity and beneficence.

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For to our praise it must be owned, that it will not be easy to find any age or nation in which both private and public benevolence was ever carried to so high a pitch, or distributed in so many different channels, as it is amongst ourselves at this day. Numerous as the evils are to which man is naturally subject, and industrious as he is in creating others by his own follies and indiscretions, modern charity is still equal and present to them all, and accommodates itself to the many various shapes in which human misery appears. It feeds the hungry, clothes the naked, visits the sick, protects the widow, relieves the stranger, educates the orphan, instructs the ignorant, reclaims the sinner, receives the penitent. So far, then, you have done well; you have discharged, perhaps, one branch of your duty, but how have you performed the others? What regard, more especially, have you paid to that virtue which is linked with charity in the very words of the text? Whilst you "visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, do you "keep yourselves unspotted from the world?" Are you plain and simple in your diet and your attire? Are you sober, chaste, and modest? Are you temperate in your pleasures, and discreet in your amusements? Do you mingle solitude and reflection with business and with society? Do you bridle your tongues, and moderate your desires? Do you keep your bodies under and bring them into subjection? Do you crucify the flesh with all its affections and lusts? Do you carefully avoid every thing that may inflame and stimulate your passions? Are you, in short, as rigorous to yourselves as you are benevolent to others? If to these questions your consciences can answer, with truth, in the affirmative; and if to all this you have added the sincerest sentiments of love and gratitude to your Maker, your Redeemer, your Sanctifier, then, indeed, you have been good and faithful servants to your heavenly Master; then may you safely call yourselves disciples of Christ; and with humble reliance on his merits, not your own, may expect to enter into the joy of your Lord.

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But if, on the contrary, there are but too evident marks among certain classes of men of an inextinguishable thirst for pleasure and amusement, and those too not always of the most innocent and reputable nature; if luxury not only prevails as a fashion, but is studied as a science; if charity is in some persons nothing more than a cloak for voluptuousness; if benevolence is industriously and officiously, I had almost said invidiously, cried up, and magnified as the *only* duty of a man, nay, even of a Christian; whilst purity is ridiculed and set at nought, as a sour, unsocial, unhumanized virtue; is called austerity, preciseness, puritanism, or any thing but what it really is; if the natural consequences of this licentious doctrine are but too visible in that rapid growth of dissoluteness amongst us, which seems to threaten the extinction of every moral and religious principle; if, in fine, the grossest violations of decency, nay, even of connubial fidelity, are often treated with levity and gaiety, as subjects rather of pleasantry than of reproach; and are not only committed without scruple but avowed, and sometimes defended too, without a blush; if this be a faithful portrait of our manners, what infinite cause have we, amidst all our boasted charities, to tremble at the danger of our situation! It is incredible, it is impossible, that the righteous Governor of the Universe can be an unconcerned spectator of such wickedness as this!

But is our BENEVOLENCE then you will say, of no avail? Will not that shelter us from punishment? For charity, we are told, "shall cover the multitude of sins*:" and, accordingly, we take effectual care that it shall have a multitude to cover. But whose sins does St. Peter say that charity shall cover? Our own, or those of others? He may only mean, that a charitable man will not wantonly *divulge*, but will *cover*, will throw a veil over, the failings of his neighbor. But supposing, what is most probable, that our own sins are meant, what sort of sins do you think that charity shall cover? Not, surely, those gross, presumptuous habitual ones,

* 1 Pet iv. 8.

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which we would gladly shelter under it; but those casual slips and inadvertencies, those almost unavoidable errors, weaknesses, and imperfections, to which the very best of men are subject, and which are almost the only sins that a truly charitable man can have to cover. For what is this charity, at last, of which such great things are said in Scripture? Read over that well-known, and most eloquent description of it by St. Paul, and you will find it to be something very different from that false image of it which the philosophy of this world has set up to worship. From thence, from the whole tenor of Scripture you will find it to be not merely an easy, undistinguishing good nature, or a thoughtless, profuse, pernicious liberality; but an inward principle of universal kind affection, founded in nature, improved by reason, and perfected by grace; restraining us, in the first place, from doing harm; then prompting us, on every occasion, and towards every person, to do all the good we possibly can. This is the only charity that the Gospel is acquainted with; the only one, that in conjunction with repentance, and faith in our Redeemer, can in the least contribute to obtain pardon for our failings, and render us meet to be partakers of the kingdom of Heaven.

In whatever sense, then, we understand the expression of *charity covering our sins*, the sensualist can never avail himself of that protection, because he acts in direct contradiction to the very first principles of true Christian charity. "Love worketh no ill to his neighbor," says St. Paul; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law; and therefore he who works such ill to his neighbor, as the voluptuary does every day, (by destroying the innocence, the peace, the comfort, the happiness, temporal and eternal, of those very persons for whom he professes the tenderest regard,) must be an utter stranger to *real* philanthrophy. Though he may feed the hungry and clothe the naked, and visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction; yet, if to gratify his own passions, he plunges those who have never offended him in misery and disgrace, he is a hurtful member

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of society. Nay, perhaps his very liberality and good-nature serve only to render him the *more* hurtful. They throw a lustre over the criminal part of his character, and render him an object of admiration to the crowd of servile imitators, who not having the sense to separate his vices from his accomplishments, from their conduct upon his example in the gross, and hope to become equally agreeable by being equally wicked. And, as if it was not enough to have these patterns before our eyes in real life, they are once more served up to us in the productions of some modern writers, who, to the fond ambition of what they call copying after nature, and of gaining a name, are content to sacrifice the interests of virtue, and to lend a willing hand towards finishing the corruption of our manners. Hence it is, that in several of our most favorite works of fancy and amusement, the principal figure of the piece is some professed libertine, who, on the strength of a pleasing figure, a captivating address, and a certain amiable generosity of disposition, has the privilege of committing whatever irregularities he thinks fit, and of excusing them in the easiest manner imaginable, as the unavoidable effects of constitution, and the little foibles of a heart intrinsically good. Thus, whilst he delights our imagination, and wins our affections, he never fails, at the same time, to corrupt our principles. And young people, more especially, instead of being inspired with a just detestation of vice, are furnished with apologies for it which they never forget, and are even taught to consider it as a necessary part of an accomplished character.

It becomes, then, every sincere Christian to oppose to the utmost this prevailing licentiousness, which insinuates itself into the manners and minds of men, under the protection of some engaging qualities, with which it sometimes *is*, but much oftener *affects* to be, united. And the only way of putting a stop to this mischief, and of restoring that union which the text enforces, and which ought always to subsist between the two great branches of practical morality, is to show

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by our example (the most intelligible and convincing of all proofs) that BENEVOLENCE is then most lovely, when joined with its true ally, its proper companion, SELF-GOVERNMENT; that, in order to form a pleasing character, it is by no means necessary to throw into it any impure alloy; but that on the contrary, a truly pious and strictly moral Christian, will not only be the most virtuous, but the most amiable of men.

Unhappily, indeed, a contrary opinion has too long and too generally prevailed amongst us; and licentious wits have taught great numbers to believe that purity of manners is a vulgar and a contemtpible virtue, and that all pretence to it is in general nothing more than hypocrisy and grimace. But let us not be frightened by a few hard words and a little witless buffoonery, from pursuing steadily the invariable rule of moral rectitude. As sure as God himself is all purity and perfection, there is such a thing as real purity of heart and life; and it is one of the most exalted virtues that can dignify human nature. It gives that strength and vigour and masculine firmness to the mind, which is the foundation of every thing great and excellent. It has produced some of the noblest struggles, and most heroical exertions, of soul, that the world ever saw, and is, perhaps, a more convincing, more unequivocal proof of our sincerity in religion, than even benevolence itself. When it is considered how many inducements, how many *temptations*, there are to acts of humanity, to which nature prompts, to which fashion draws, to which vanity, interest, popularity, ambition, sometimes lead us, one cannot *always* be sure that they proceed from a truly Christian principle. But he who combats his darling passions, and gives up the fondest wishes of his soul; who keeps a constant guard upon all his thoughts, words, and actions; intrepidly withstands the most alluring temptations, and taken up his Cross to follow Christ; this man cannot well be influenced by any thing but a strong sense of duty, and an undissembled conviction that he is bound to obey even the severest precepts of the Gospel. *His* good

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actions are neither seen nor applauded of men. They are performed in secrecy and in silence without ostentation, without regard, save only the approbation of that all-seeing God, who is witness to the bitter conflicts of his soul, and will one day make him ample amends in the sight of angels and of men.

Let it not, however, be supposed that any thing here said is meant to depreciate that most heavenly virtue, charity, or to rob those that exercise it of that fair fame, that heartfelt satisfaction, and those glorious rewards hereafter, which through the merits of their Redeemer cannot fail to recompense their generous labors. May every branch and species of benevolence for ever flourish and abound. May its divine and blessed influence spread continually wider and wider, till it takes in every creature under heaven, and leaves not one misery unalleviated, one grievance unredressed. But all excellent as it is, let not this, let not any single virtue, engross our whole attention. Let us not confine ourselves to the easy, the delightful, the reputable works of beneficence, and neglect the other great branch of moral duty, SELF-DENIAL; no less necessary and important, but much more difficult, and which, therefore, stands in need of every possible argument in its favor to recommend and support it. Let us no longer make invidious and unjust distinctions between these two kindred virtues. In nature, in reason, in the sight of God, in the Gospel of Christ, self-government is of equal value with social duties. They equally tend to the perfection of our own minds and the comfort of our fellow-creatures. The same rewards are in Scripture promised to both; the same penalties are denounced against the violation of both; and there is so strict and intimate a union between them, that the cultivation or neglect of the one, must necessarily lead, and has, in fact, always ultimately led, to the improvement or deprivation of the other. What then God and nature, as well as Christ and his apostles, have joined together, let no man dare to put asunder. Let not any one flatter himself with the hope of obtaining the rewards,

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or even escaping the punishments of the Gospel, by performing only *one* branch of his duty. Let him not imagine, that the most rigorous severity of manners can excuse him from the exercise of undissembled love to God and to mankind; nor, on the other hand, let him suppose, that under the shelter either of devotion or of benevolence, he may securely indulge his favorite passions; may compound, as it were, with God for his sensuality by acts of generosity, and purchase by his wealth a general license to sin. Let him not, in short, content himself with being only half a Christian. Let him visit, as often as he pleases, the fatherless and the widows in their affliction. Let his piety be fervent, and his faith sincere. But let him, at the same time, take care, as he values his salvation, that he keep himself unspotted from the world.

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SERMON XXV*.

2 KINGS iv. 1.

Thy servant my husband is dead, and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the Lord; and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bond-men.

THE unhappy sufferer, who makes this most moving complaint, was the widow of one of the sons of the prophets, whose distress Elisha immediately relieved by the miraculous increase of her pot of oil. It will not be easy to find in any writer, sacred or profane, a more piteous story, or a case more applicable to the occasion of the present meeting. I cannot therefore do better than leave it upon your minds in that concise and affecting simplicity in which it is here related, whilst I proceeded to recommend the distressed Widows and Children of the English Clergy to your benevolent protection.

The nature and design of the several charitable institutions, which have now brought us together, are, I presume, so well understood in this place, that there can be no need to take up any of your time in explaining them†. The generous support they have hitherto met

* Preached at the anniversary meeting of the Sons of the Clergy, May 9, 1776.

† But it may not perhaps be generally known that there are *three distinct societies* formed for the benefit of the indigent widows and children of the Clergy, and all closely connected with each other.

The first and principal is *The Corporation for the Relief of the poor Widows and Children of Clergymen*, established by charter in the reign of King Charles the Second. The funds of this charity are employed chiefly in giving pensions to the widows of the clergy.

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with demands our most grateful acknowledgments; and in order to keep this friendly dispositions towards us alive and warm in your breasts, I shall attempt to show that the clergy of the Church of England have, both on account of their *public services*, and (with respect to too large a part) their *private necessities*, a peculiar claim to your kind attention and assistance.

If we go back to the early ages of Christianity our own Ecclesiastics had their share, with others of the sacred order, in first introducing the light of the Gospel into this country, and in sacrificing to its advancement their ease, their health, their fortunes, their lives. When in after-times, by a variety of concurrent causes, this kingdom was, in common with all its neighbors, overwhelmed with the most deplorable darkness and ignorance; and when that stupendous fabric of popish tyranny and superstition was, like another Babel, raised up with incredible art and diligence, to the very skies; yet still the Christian clergy in general, and ours among the rest, were of no small benefit to the community. It is acknowledged by an historian, who has never betrayed any partiality to our order, that in the period we are speaking of, "the profession and (let me add) *the* "*disposition* of the churchmen, averse to arms and vio- "lence, tempered the general turn to military enter- "prises, and maintained even amidst the shock of "arms, those secret links without which it is impossi-

The second, which rose not long after, is, *The Society of the Feast of the Sons of the Clergy*, consisting of the company annually assembled under that name at St. Paul's Church, and Merchant-Taylors Hall. The money collected at those two places is wholly expended in apprenticing out the children of necessitous clergymen. The expenses of the music and the feast are generously defrayed by the stewards of that society.

The third, is *The Society of Stewards and Subscribers for maintaining and educating the poor Orphans of the Clergy till of age to be put Apprentices.*

This society was formed in the year 1749. It is composed of those who have been stewards of the former society, and any others who chuse to become members of it. It is supported by annual subscriptions of one guinea each, and maintains two schools, one for boys, and the other for girls, in which the orphans of the clergy are educated till they are of sufficient age to go out to apprenticeships.

It might be of use if a short and clear account of these societies was printed in a small tract, describing their nature and design, together with the proper time and method of applying to them for relief, and the persons to whom such applications should be made.

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"ble for human society to subsist*." Nay, even many privileges of the order that were justly looked upon with a jealous eye, yet proved, in those turbulent ages, a check to the despotism of our monarchs, and at the same time kept the community from falling to pieces by the factions and quarrels of the nobles. And it ought never to be forgotten, that for what we call our MAGNA CHARTA, that main foundation (as it is generally held to be) of our free constitution, we are principally indebted to the eloquence, the spirit, and the activity of an English primate†, assisted and supported by almost the whole body of his clergy. It is true, indeed, in other respects the conduct of our Ecclesiastics was not always so irreproachable as might have been wished; for they must needs partake in some degree of the corruption and barbarity which then generally prevailed. Yet great numbers of them, did notwithstanding, preserve themselves pure and undefiled from the vices of the age, and were exemplary in their manners, temperate, charitable, meek and heavenly-minded. Their cloysters were a retreat not merely, as is commonly supposed, for the idle and dissolute, but for the studious, the afflicted, the penitent and the devout. They afforded support to all the neighboring poor, and in those days of lawless violence, were extremely useful as places of refuge and security to the defenceless and the weak. In them too were deposited many of those precious remains of antiquity which we now peruse with so much delight, and which, had it not been for the protection they found in religious houses, would, in all probability, have perished by the hands of those barbarians that spread ruin and desolation over Europe.

* Hume's Hist. of England, Hen. III. vol. ii. p. 10. 1st edit. 4to. 1762.

† Stephen Langton, archbishop of Canterbury; "a man whose memo-"ry," says the historian above mentioned, "ought always to be respected "by the English." Vol. I. p. 382.

In the following reign the abbots and prelates were very instrumental in obtaining the same security from Hen. III. and they endeavored to guard against all future violations of it by a most tremendous ceremony. They stood round the GREAT CHARTER, whilst it was read in parliament, with burning tapers in their hands, and denounced the sentence of excommunication against every one that should thenceforth dare to infringe that fundamental law. Ib. Vol. II. p. 25, 26.

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In these peaceful sanctuaries, the leisure and tranquillity which the monks enjoyed, enabled them not only to record (however uncouthly) the transactions of their own times, but to transcribe the compositions of former and more valuable writers. Nor was this the only object of their attention. They found time to cultivate even some of the finer arts. Those sublime powers of harmony, which have been this very day so nobly and laudably exerted in the cause of the fatherless and the widow, owe their birth in this country to monastic diligence and ingenuity. Both the theory and the practice of music were first studied and taught here, and in other parts of Europe, by the regular clergy*; and what is now the delight and amusement of all ranks of people, was originally the offspring of Religion, and appropriated solely to the purpose of animating devotion, and giving dignity and solemnity to the service of the church. The monks drew up a large number of treatises on this subject, which notwithstanding the barbarism of the times, were written with great perspicuity, method, and precision; and they had seminaries of young people under their care, whom they instructed in the rudiments of this science. Libraries were also formed in all the monasteries, and schools founded in them and near most of the cathedrals, for teaching the literature of the times†. And thus was learning kept alive at least, though in a very languid state, till the art of printing was found out. Even that most useful art itself was, according to the opinion of some learned men, which seems to be well founded, first brought into our island by the care and generosity of an English primate‡. In the restoration of letters, which quickly followed, the Ecclesiastics

* See Dr. Burney's Hist. of Music, vol. ii. p. 68. And Sir John Hawkin's Preliminary Disc. p. 48 to 53: and vol. v. p. 112, 113.

† Vide Moshemii Hist. Eccles. sec. vi. par. ii. c. 1. p. 237.

‡ Archbishop Bourchier; who persuaded Henry VI. to furnish one Mr. Robert Turnour with a thousand marks (towards which the archbishop contributed three hundred), and to send him privately to Harlem, in company with Caxton, in order to fetch from thence the new-invented art of printing; which he did accordingly, by bringing over to England Frederick Corsellis, one of the compositors at Harlem. See Biograph. Britann. art.

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took the lead, and contributed more than any other set of men to introduce a true taste for every branch of polite and useful learning into this country. From that period to the present, they have always made a distinguished figure in the whole circle of sciences and arts; their writings have ever ranked amongst the purest of their times; and let the occasion excuse me if I add, (the proofs of what I say are before the world) that our profession is at this very day adorned by men, who, in genius, learning, judgment, taste, and elegance of composition, have few if any superiors.

Whoever, then, is a friend to literature and the fine arts, must be a friend to the English clergy, and will cheerfully contribute to the relief of that order which has so largely contributed to his information and amusement. But they have still more substantial services than these to plead. To them you stand principally indebted, not only for the restoration of letters, but the revival of true Religion. For although the first opposition made here to the usurpations of the Church of Rome took its rise from the passions of an impetuous prince, yet the work of reformation itself was undoubtedly begun, carried on, and completed by the hands of the English clergy. In this glorious cause they wrote with irresistible strength of argument, and suffered with invincible fortitude of mind. To their labors, their piety and learning, their judgment and moderation, you owe that pure mode of worship, and that excellent form of public prayer you now enjoy; the constant use of which in the Church of England, has undoubtedly, in more respects than one, been of infinite service to the people of this kingdom. And when, at a subsequent period, our religious as well as civil liberties were in the most imminent danger of being destroyed by the intemperate zeal of a bigotted and despotic monarch, then again did the clergy courageously step forth in defence of both. From them originated one

Bourchier. Dr. Middleton, indeed, and others, have endeavored to disprove the truth of this story; but their most material objections to it have been well answered by Mr. Meerman, in his very curious and learned work, entitled, Origines Typographicæ, vol. ii.

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of the very first parliamentary checks to the violences of James II.* By their excellent discourses and writings against popery, the people were first roused to a just abhorrence of that dangerous superstition†. By their decent, yet manly firmness, in supporting their invaded rights, the rest of the nation was inspired with a similar resolution to resist the precipitate and unconstitutional measures of an infatuated court; and throughout the whole of that memorable and glorious transaction, their behavior was at once so prudent and intrepid, so suitable to their profession, and so friendly to the righteous cause of genuine liberty and pure religion, that they received one of the highest and most flattering rewards with which a British subject can be honored, the unanimous thanks of the Commons of Great Britain in Parliament assembled‡.

These, perhaps it will be said, though important, are past services, and are calculated to prove, not what we ourselves, but what our predecessors have done for the public. Yet surely they are reasons for esteeming the order in general, for bearing testimony to the merits of those who have formerly adorned it, and for exercising every act of kindness and humanity towards

* Henry Compton, bishop of London, in the name of his brethren, made a motion in the House of Lords to take into consideration King James' famous speech in the second session of parliament, in which he signified his intention of *dispensing* with the Test-acts. The bishop's motion was carried. Hume's Hist. vol. vi. p. 390.—I have referred to this historian all along, for no other reason, than because his testimony, when given in *favor* of the clergy (whom he sincerely hated) is unexceptionable.

†. To the same eminent persons we owe the subversion of the whole system of Atheistic Philosophy, from its very foundations. See the Bishop of Worcester's Sermons. S. i. p. 23.

‡ Journals of the House of Commons, Feb. 1, 1688.

Among other instances of cool yet resolute opposition to the despotism of James by the prelates and clergy of the Church of England at this momentous period, the reader will recollect with peculiar veneration and gratitude, Bishop Compton's refusal to comply with the king's illegal order to suspend Dr. Sharp, for preaching against popery; the resistance made by Dr. Hough, and the Fellows of Magdalen College in Oxford, to the king's arbitrary mandate in favor of a popish president; and the truly noble and patriotic conduct of the seven Bishops who were sent to the Tower, and brought to a public trial for their petition to the throne against the second Declaration of Indulgence founded *on the Dispensing Power*. These acts of magnanimity on the part of the English clergy, indisputably prepared and led the way to the great and glorious events which soon after followed.

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the persons who succeed them in their ministry. And even these, we hope, have something to plead in their behalf. They have not, we trust, materially departed from the principles of their ancestors.* The English clergy, we do not scruple to say, are still zealously attached to the interests of virtue and religion; are still in general, faithful, diligent, and regular in the discharge of their sacred functions. They are still sincere friends to *real constitutional* freedom; and the very same love of it, which at the Revolution led them to refuse a slavish and unlimited obedience to the illegal mandates of arbitrary power, induces them now to promote, both by their doctrine and their example, that dutiful respect, and conscientious submission to all lawful authority, which the Gospel most peremptorily enjoins; the extreme want of which is at present but too visible, and yet without which no true liberty can long subsist. But although, on these grounds, they have judged it expedient to throw their weight into the scale of government, yet they have done this without any unbecoming vehemence or heat; and amidst all the violent dissensions which have lately agitated this kingdom they have, as a body, conducted themselves with a degree of prudence, temper, mildness and moderation, which must do them no small credit in the eyes of every unprejudiced observer*. And that, in other respects, their talents, their learning, and their morals, are such as have gained them general approbation and esteem, may be collected from this single circumstance; that when you want to find out proper instructors for your children, you naturally turn your thoughts to the clergy; and it is in their hands, in their houses, you chuse to place whatever you hold most dear and valuable in the world. To them, in short, has long been, and still is, confided that most important trust, the education of youth; a trust which it is no vain boast to say, they have discharged with fidelity

* These remarks, though first made in the year 1776, are no less true at the present moment.

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and ability*. Under their direction, the schools and universities of this kingdom have acquired an acknowledged superiority over all the other seminaries of Europe. In their colleges have been formed most of those great and illustrious characters that have contributed to the glory and prosperity of this country: and even among that large number of persons here present, there are few I apprehend, who have not, at some period of their lives, derived considerable benefit from the instructions of our order.

These known and undeniable facts are, we conceive, very unequivocal proofs of our good conduct and good estimation; and ought greatly to outweigh all those unmerited calumnies which are so often thrown both upon the order in general, and the individuals of which it is composed, by those who know very little of either†. That there are in ours, as in every other profession, several unworthy members, it is in vain to deny; and where can be the wonder, if in so very numerous a society some apostates should be found? But take the whole in one collective view, and it may with the greatest truth be affirmed, that you will no where find, either in ancient or modern times, a body of more than ten thousand persons, situated in the midst of a populous, rich, commercial, luxurious kingdom, surrounded with every temptation, and every danger to which virtue can be exposed, whose morals are so blameless, and so little injured by the general contagion, as those of the

* How well qualified they are for this employment, has been fully shown by a consummate judge of the subject of education, in the *Dialogues on the Uses of Foreign Travel*, 1st ed. *Dial.* 2. *p.* 183. The attentive perusal of these inimitable Dialogues is strongly recommended to all those who prefer a foreign university to our own, or who suffer their sons to ramble over Europe at an early and most dangerous period of life, not only without a clerical governor, but even sometimes without any governor at all.

† "The rule," says a great and good prelate, "which most of our adversaries seem to have set themselves is, to be at all adventures as bitter as they can; and they follow it not only beyond truth, but beyond probability; asserting the very worst things of us without foundation, and exaggerating every thing without mercy; imputing the faults, and sometimes imaginary faults of particular persons, to the whole order; and then declaiming against us all promiscuously with such wild vehemence, as, in any case but ours, they themselves would think in the highest degree cruel and unjust." *Secker's Charges*, p. 5.

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English clergy. With respect to that part of them, more especially, whose families (when they themselves shall be no more) will probably want the protection of this charity, it is but justice to them to say, that their conduct renders them worthy of every act of kindness which their poverty may require. Contented, humble, modest, patient, and laborious, their lives are divided between fulfilling the duties of their profession, and struggling with the difficulties of their situation. Nay, it is to their virtue chiefly that these very distresses are owing. They are formed with the same passions and propensities as other men; and were they as little scrupulous about the means of gratifying them as others too commonly are; had they adopted that very commodious system of modern ethics, which ranks hypocrisy and adultery among the requisites of a good education, there would certainly be no need for us ever to become your petitioners for their widows and children. But as they have been trained up in a religion which requires unblemished purity of manners and of heart, they think themselves bound to keep within the limits prescribed by their heavenly Master, and to allow themselves no gratifications but those which he has pronounced lawful and honorable. Hence they are often induced to contract early marriages, and find themselves surrounded by a numerous family before they are provided with the means of supporting them. At the same time they are expected to live creditably, and to maintain a decent hospitality amongst their neighbors. To them the poor, the sick, the distressed part of their flock, naturally look up, as their chief refuge and support; and in some small villages (if you except parochial relief) the minister of the parish is almost the only resource they have. These demands he is commonly inclined to answer to the utmost of his power. Perhaps, too, he may have the misfortune of a little taste for books, which is not indulged without expense; and from his acquaintance with the best and purest writers of antiquity, as well as from the habits and connections of his early years, he may have acquired sentiments

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and feelings far beyond the straitness of his circumstances, and the humility of his condition. Hence, besides the large sums which he is often obliged to expend on the necessary repairs of his parsonage, he may possibly be induced to add a few conveniences to it; he may even be tempted, by the natural beauties of its situation, to expend more in improving and adorning his little territories, and in rendering them comfortable and delightful to himself and those that follow him, than in strict prudence he ought. In a few years his sons must be sent to schools and universities, or to trades and professions: and if, perchance, he should be ambitious of giving his daughters also a few useful accomplishments, let us pardon him this wrong; it is the only fortune he can give them. These expenses necessarily oblige him to anticipate his narrow income, and to contract, perhaps a considerable debt; a load which often lies so heavy upon his mind, that it brings him prematurely down with sorrow to the grave. Then it is that his wife and children find themselves plunged not only in the severest affliction, but in embarrassments out of which they are utterly unable to extricate themselves. It is then the widow may, with but too much propriety, address herself to every one of us in the words of the text, "Thy servant my husband is "dead, and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the "Lord, and the credior is come to take unto him my "two sons to be bond-men." Her children cannot, indeed, in this land of freedom, be literally carried into bondage; but it is necessary, both for their subsistence and her's, that they should all, in one way or other, be taken away from her, and subjected probably to much harsher usage than they had hitherto experienced. The head is gone, and the little society is dissolved; they must quit the beloved mansion where they have spent their lives, and which they have made so neat and cheerful at their own cost, perhaps with the labor of their own hands. The small remnant of books and furniture, that constituted all their wealth, they see disposed of for the benefit of their creditors; and then—they have no-

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thing to do but to disperse themselves where they can to seek support.

In this critical moment it is that these charitable establishments open their friendly arms to receive them and each bears its respective part in ministering to their necessities*. *The Incorporate Society* takes the widow under its immediate protection, and allows her a decent pension so long as her condition and her circumstances continue unchanged. *The Society of Stewards and Subscribers, instituted in the year* 1749, undertakes the maintenance and education of her children, till they are of age to be apprenticed; and when they *are* of sufficient age, *The Society of the Feast of the Sons of the Clergy* provides them with proper masters, and puts them into a way of obtaining a comfortable subsistence, and becoming useful members of society.

Thus you see, each of these excellent institutions has its proper use and peculiar department; and all of them concur in forming one noble comprehensive plan of national charity. But this plan can never be carried into execution without the aid of the wealthy and the great. The Corporation has indeed a fund of its own; but this fund, without occasional donations and benefactions, would be very inadequate to the objects that stand in need of its assistance. As to the other two humane societies, one of which educates the poor orphans which the other places out in the world, these I say, are entirely supported by voluntary contributions and subscriptions; and you will not, I am sure, through an ill-judged parsimony, "suffer any of our "little ones to perish†."

Yet, notwithstanding the apparent utility, and even necessity, of these benevolent foundations, their friends have with no small concern observed, that they have for some time past been rather losing ground than gaining it. For this, various reasons have been assigned; but none, I apprehend, of sufficient weight to abate any thing of our ardor in support of such generous designs. It has been thought by some, that

* See the note above page 320, 321. † Matt. xviii. 14.

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there is now the less need for a general contribution of this nature for the widows and children of the clergy, because there are in particular dioceses several local institutions of the same kind. It is true there are; but they are not near so universal as might be wished: they reach only, I conceive, to a small part of the kingdom, and their operation is of course confined within a narrow compass. But were they much more numerous than they are, were they even spread through every part of the island, yet still this original parent of them all ought to be preserved and fostered with religious veneration and care. For the growing increase of expense in many necessary articles of life, makes a proportionable increase in the wants of the poorer clergy, which by this means keep pace with the provisions made in their favor; and they can but ill spare the loss of any assistance, whether general or local, which they have been accustomed to receive.

There is still another circumstance which may have contributed to the decrease of our collections, and that is the great number of other public charities of various kinds, which have of late years been established in this kingdom. And if this is really the case, we must not, we do not, complain. If others cannot be benefited but by our loss, we are content. But when we find ourselves in the very center of the richest commercial city in the world*, we cannot possibly entertain the least apprehensions on this head. In any other place, perhaps, there might be room to fear that the stream of beneficence, when divided into several new channels, might forsake the old. But be these channels ever so numerous, *your* liberality can fill them all. It is as inexhaustible as your wealth, which is daily flowing in upon you from every quarter of the globe, and can enrich and fertilize a vast variety of different regions at the same time. Let then other charities spring up in whatever numbers they will; we look not upon them with an envious or a jealous eye; we consider them

* This sermon was preached in St. Paul's church, in the presence of the Lord Mayor, Alderman, &c. of the city of London.

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not as rivals, but as sharers, in your bounty, which is able to embrace both them and us. Far from wishing to discourage, far from wishing to depreciate, other benevolent institutions, and to form invidious comparisons between them and ours, we sincerely wish them, on the contrary, all imaginable success, in full confidence that in a capital like this it will not, it cannot, be any obstruction to our own. You yourselves are our witnesses, that there are none more ready to countenance every humane design than the English clergy*. There is hardly one public charity to be named that has not some of our order amongst its friends and supporters; and if we have any gifts of eloquence, any powers of persuasion to boast, they are always ready at your call to recommend every generous plan that you think fit to patronize; your schools, your hospitals, your sick, your prisoners, your poor. That assistance, then, which we are ever disposed to give, we now hope in our turn to receive. Strike out into as many different paths of benevolence as you please; yet desert not, we beseech you, the old, the tried, the approved one, to which you have been so long accustomed. This charity† has always been your favorite child; it has been born and bred amongst you; you have hitherto nursed and cherished it with the tenderest care; do not now abandon it to the wide world, where it is not yet strong enough to make its way without your help.

You have seen, I trust, upon the whole, that they for whose families we beg relief, "are worthy for "whom you should do this‡:" that those on whom they depended for support and whose help they have lost, were, both by profession and by principle, most useful members of society; and yet were unable to leave their children any other inheritance than that of

* One very recent and remarkable proof of this ought not to be passed over in silence. Mr. Hetherington, a private clergyman, gave birth, within these few years, to a new and most judicious species of charity. He established an annual provision for fifty blind persons, and appropriated, *in his life-time*, to this excellent purpose, a fund of twenty thousand pounds.

‡ Icluding the three different branches of it abovementioned, p. 320, 321.

† Luke vii. 4.

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extreme poverty, aggravated by the remembrance of happier days, and by minds susceptible of the keenest feelings. May these considerations have their due influence on your hearts! And may we, my reverend brethren, never forget that it is in our power, by our future conduct, to give these considerations whatever weight we think fit! If we do not give them all we can; if, in proportion as we stand more in need of public favor, we do not redouble our endeavors to deserve it; by a discreet inoffensive behavior and conversation, by residence on our preferments, by a close attention to the proper studies and functions of our profession, by fervent piety, by extensive charity, by meekness and humility, by a disinterested and ardent zeal for the advancement of religion, and the salvation of mankind; if, I say, by these, and such-like evangelical virtues, we do not support the credit of our character, and by real usefulness acquire veneration and esteem; we shall be no less blind to our interest, than unmindful of our duty both to God and man*.

* See Archbishop Secker's truly pastoral Charges throughout; which well deserve the serious attention of every sincere and conscientious clergyman in every rank of the profession.

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SERMON XXVI.

ECCLESIASTES xii. 1.

Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.

THE reason why we are here, and in other places of Scripture, more particularly enjoined to remember GOD IN OUR YOUTH, is obvious; it is, because we are then most apt to forget him. Indeed, in every stage of life as well as this, the cares and pleasures of the world too often engross our chief attention, and banish for a while the remembrance of our Maker. But it is in youth only we seem to be sunk in a total forgetfulness of Religion, and "to have not God in all our "thoughts." In a more advanced age, reason becomes so strong, or appetite so weak, that even in the busiest and the gayest scenes, we must have some intervals of thinking, we must have our solitary and serious moments, in which the idea of a God *will* recur and force itself upon our minds. The calamities and disappointments which we meet with, as we travel forwards in this vale of tears, the loss of friends or of fortune, acute pains, and lingering diseases, are so many awakening instances of our weakness and dependence, and compel us, in spite of indolence or pride, to look up to Heaven, and our Father that is in Heaven, for assistance and protection. But in youth, these faithful monitors are wanting; there are, then, generally speaking, no cares or afflictions to remind us of our Creator, and bring us to a just sense of our duty. The novelty of the objects that successively surround us at our first entrance into life, supplies us with a perpetual fund of

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entertainment; and an uninterrupted flow of health and spirits "fills our mouth with laughter, and our tongue "with joy." We find ourselves happy, and consider not who it was that made us so; we find ourselves in a wide theatre of action, and without thinking how we are to perform our respective parts upon it, survey with rapture those enchanting scenes that every where open to our view, and launch out in pursuit of the pleasures that are before us with so much eagerness and precipitation, as to leave no time either to trace them backwards to their source, or forwards to their consequences. From these false steps in our setting out, flow most of the fatal errors and miscarriages of our future conduct; and for want of a little recollection when we are young, we too often lay up a store of misery for the remaining part of our existence here, and for all eternity hereafter.

Since, then, in our early years, we are for the most part destitute of those useful mementos, and those favorable seasons of recollection, which occur so often in the other parts of life; and are, therefore, more particularly prone to forget our Maker at a time when it least becomes us so to do, the admonition contained in the text must seem highly proper, and cannot be too often inculcated, in order to supply, in some measure, that unhappy insensibility, that inattention to every thing serious and religious, which is so generally observable, and so much complained of, in youth.

No man could be more sensible of this, or more seriously lament it, than the ROYAL PREACHER from whom these words are taken. He saw a melancholy instance of it in the conduct of his own son, who began now probably to give some indications of that fiery and ungovernable temper, which afterwards proved so fatal to himself, and to his kingdom. He, therefore, urges the necessity of remembering God in our youth, not only with all the authority of an experienced sage, and an inspired writer but with all the tenderness of a parent solicitous for the welfare and prosperity of his child.

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And this may, perhaps, be one reason of those frequent and pressing exhortations to an early piety, which are every where scattered up and down in his writings. They had, however, no doubt, a view to the depravity of youth in general, as well as of Rehoboam in particular; and as we may, I think, venture to say, that there is at least as much occasion for a repeated injunction of this duty in the present times, as in the days of Solomon, it shall be the business of this discourse to recommend and enforce an early piety, by showing, first, the reasonableness and propriety of it; and, secondly, by pointing out some of the principal advantages which will attend the practice of it.

I. First, then, I am to show the reasonableness and propriety of remembering our Creator in the days of our youth.

And here it is evident, that by remembering our Creator, we are not merely to understand a habit of recalling the bare idea of him to our mind, or a cold, lifeless contemplation of his existence, but such a fervent, affectionate, grateful remembrance, as is sometimes kindled in our breasts by thinking on an absent or a departed friend, when every tender circumstance of that endearing connection rushes in upon the soul, and all his friendly offices, all the pleasing instances of his love and kindness towards us, present themselves at once to our view. We must not only remember that he *is*, but that he is our Creator, and that with all those sentiments of piety and love, which such a relation naturally suggests. We must remember that he gave us life and all its blessings, all that we actually enjoy here or hope to enjoy hereafter; and we must show the reality of this remembrance by making a suitable return for such invaluable favors. For even in the most familiar forms of speaking, to remember a kindness is to requite it; and the only return that a creature can make to his Creator, is an uniform obedience to his will, and a punctual observance of all his laws. But that which the text more particularly recommends to the young man, is the remembrance of God as *his Creator*, not

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only because the communication of existence of course includes every other blessing, but because this consideration is more peculiarly adapted to the circumstances of those to whom the precept is addressed. For if even when life is become familiar to us, when we have tasted its sorrows as well as its joys, the remembrance of our Creator is yet apt sometimes to excite the warmest returns of gratitude and devotion, how ought this reflection to work on the hearts of those who are, as it were, fresh from the hands of their Maker, and unacquainted with every thing in life but its blessings? How can the young man forbear breaking out with the royal psalmist into that passionate overflowing of a grateful heart; "Praise the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within "me praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, O my "soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgi- "veth all thy sins, and healeth all thine infirmities; "who saveth thy life from destruction, and crowneth "thee with mercy and loving kindness; who satisfieth "thy mouth with good things, making thee young and "lusty as an eagle*." One would imagine, indeed, that instead of thinking it could ever be too soon, men should rather fear it would be always full late, to remember their Creator, and that life itself would be short enough for making returns to his unbounded mercies. Yet such is the strange perverseness, shall I call it, or thoughtlessness of youth, that the goodness of God generally produces a quite contrary effect; and that profusion of happiness, which ought to bind them for ever to his service, is the very thing that supplants him in their affections, and banishes the remembrance of him from their minds. Their pleasures and pursuits follow so close upon one another, as to leave no room for any serious reflections to intervene; or if, by chance, any religious thought intrude upon the series of their joys, they instantly dismiss the unbidden, unwelcome guest, with the answer of Felix to Paul; "Go thy way for "this time, when we have a convenient season we will "send for thee." But let not the young man flatter him-

* Psalm ciii. 1, 2, 3, 4. 5.

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self that any season is so convenient as the present, or that God will be content with the dregs of life, and the refuse of his years; let him not foolishly imagine, that after having spent his best days in the service of sin, the wretched remains of them are an offering fit for his Creator; or that a soul polluted with guilt, and a body emaciated with disease, will be accepted at the altar of the Almighty. No; he demands the first and fairest of all our days, the first and purest motions of the heart; the first fruits "of that vineyard which his "right hand hath planted, and of the branch that he "made so strong for himself*."

It can be, indeed, but little proof of our loyalty not to rebel against our Sovereign, when we have not strength to take up arms, and there are no temptations to make us swerve from our allegiance; but if, when we are in our full strength and vigor; when the danger is near, and the enemy at the gate, trying every method to subdue our virtue, and corrupt our fidelity; if we then withstand in the evil day, reject his offers, repel his violence, elude his stratagems, and baffle all his attempts, we shall then, indeed, show ourselves good subjects and faithful soldiers of our heavenly Master; we shall have fought the good fight of faith, and when death shall release us from our station, may humbly hope to receive, through the merits of our Redeemer, the wages of our Christian warfare; not those perishable crowns, and that visionary immortality, which are the poor rewards of earthly heroes, but a crown of glory that fadeth not away, a real immortality of happiness in Heaven.

But this consideration more properly belongs to the second head, under which I proposed to consider some of the principal advantages arising from a course of early piety.

II. And first; he who remembers his Creator in the days of his youth, may depend upon it, that his Creator will not forget him all the days of his life. A religious young person is above all others, peculiarly ac-

* Psal. lxxx. 15.

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ceptable to the Almighty; an object upon which he looks down with an eye of uncommon favor and approbation. There cannot, indeed, be conceived a spectacle more great and lovely, than to see a young man struggling with the temptations of the world, the tyranny of custom, the solicitations of evil company, and the strength of evil passions. To see him not "meanly following a multitude to do evil," but bravely stemming the popular torrent; and whilst those around him deviate either on the one hand into the beaten road of vice, or on the other into the endless mazes of gaiety and folly; to see him left standing alone with virtue in the midst, and daring to be singularly good. To see the vigor of his understanding not sunk in sensuality, or dissipated in trifles, but rising to the noblest pursuits after truth and virtue; and the alacrity of his spirits not exhausted in the wild sallies of intemperate mirth, in ruining his own and others' innocence, and disturbing the peace and order of society; but exerting itself in the most lively display of every generous and social duty, in giving life to his devotions, and achieving the conquest over his passions. To see him, in short, sacrificing the flower of his days, his gaieties, his pleasures, and diversions, at the altar of his Creator; and in spite of the impotent wit and raillery of his gay companions, in spite of all the obstructions that the wickedness of man, or the deceitfulness of his own heart, can throw in his way, steadily and resolutely persevering in a uniform course of piety and virtue to the last.

It cannot fail, but such an one must, in the ordinary course of things, draw down upon himself the choicest blessings of Heaven. He sets out in life with fairer prospects and greater advantages than all his rival contemporaries, with the blessing of God upon all his undertakings, and a moral assurance, that whatsoever he doeth, it shall prosper. And it must surely be a most comfortable reflection to him, that "he thus "grows under the defence of the Most High, and "flourishes under the shadow of the Almighty." It

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must give life to all his designs, inspire him with a manly fortitude in all his resolutions, and diffuse an even cheerfulness and composure through his whole deportment, whilst, like his blessed Master in the same period of life, "he grows in stature and in wis-"dom, and in favor with God and man*."

2. By remembering God in our youth, we save the pains of recollecting him in old age, "when the evil "days come," (as come they assuredly will) "in "which we shall say, we have no pleasure in them." If religion is a lesson we must some time or other learn, we cannot begin too soon. It is not a thing to be taken up at our leisure, a work to be done when we have nothing else to do; but will find full employment for all the time and pains we can bestow upon it. Youth is the time when the seeds of every Christian grace and virtue are to be sown in our hearts. If we neglect this favorable season, and suffer the tares to spring up in their room, we shall not only have the painful task of implanting new affections and new desires in a worn-out soil, but of eradicating the old ones; and that, too, when they have grown up with us so long, and are so interwoven with our very constitutions, that to rend them away from the soul, will be like plucking out an eye, or tearing off a limb from the body. The Scriptures have labored to express, in the strongest terms, the extreme difficulty of such an undertaking, and made use of the boldest figures to impress a deep sense of it upon our minds. They call such a reformation in an advanced age, "beco-"ming a new creature, putting off the old man and put-"ting on the new," and compare it to "the leopard "changing its spots, and the Ethiopian his skin†." Indeed the great hardship of the task may well justify such expressions; and if any one considers what pains it costs him to wean himself even from the most whimsical and trifling customs which he has accidentally acquired and long indulged, he will easily conceive what inward pangs and agonies he must undergo,

* Luke ii. 52. † 2 Cor. v. 17. Ephes. iv. 22. 24. Jer. xiii. 23.

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before he can entirely eradicate habits that are grafted on the strongest natural desires; and effect such a total change in the whole frame and temper, in the color and complexion of his mind, as is absolutely necessary to render his reformation effectual.

We are told, indeed, in Scripture, that "the ways "of Religion are ways of pleasantness, and that all her "paths are peace;" and so they most certainly are; but it is to those only who have been accustomed to walk in them from their youth up. The gate that leadeth to this way is narrow and strait, and the road, at first, so rugged and uneven, that if we do not enter upon it till "the day is far spent, and the night draweth "on," we shall neither have time nor strength to surmount the many obstacles we shall meet with. But if the young man sets out in the morning of life, the freshness of his strength and spirits, aided by the influences of divine grace, will carry him through every difficulty. As he advances forwards, his toil grows less; the asperities of the way gradually disappear; the path grows wider, and the prospect opens, till he sees at last, with the eye of faith, that land of promise to which he hastens; a sight that cheers and revives him; when after the labors of his journey, his soul begins to faint within him. And this suggests to us a third advantage resulting from an early sense of Religion, namely, the satisfaction and comfort it will afford us on the bed of death.

3. However the young libertine may now boast himself, and triumph in his impiety, and laugh at the scrupulous timidity of those who deny themselves a thousand pleasures, which *he* boldly snatches without hesitation or remorse, yet there will come a time, and God knows how soon it may come, when his heart will quake for fear, when he will believe and tremble. Nor must he vainly flatter himself that the evil day is far off, or that when it does come, he shall face it with the same steadiness and intrepidity with which he now affronts his Maker. For whilst he sees "thousands even of "his own age, fall beside him, and ten thousand at his

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"right hand," how can he be sure that the danger will not come nigh him, especially as he takes the surest method to bring it near him, and to quicken the pace of death by his intemperance. It must, however, at last overtake him; and when it does, all his vaunted courage will at once desert him. The stoutest hearts will fail, and the fiercest spirits will be broken, when that dreadful day arrives. Our own history, and that of other nations, will furnish us with abundant instances, where the boldest chiefs in iniquity, who have gloried in the most open and avowed contempt of Religion, have yet been so utterly dismayed at the approach of death, as to sink into the most abject superstition and unmanly complaints. It is not that enterprizing spirit which carries a man so successfully through this world, that will avail him in his entrance on the next. Nothing can then support him amidst the terrors of dissolution, and the pangs of parting with all that is dear and near to him, but the reflection on a well-spent life; and as we shall stand in need of every possible increase of comfort, we ought to sweeten this reflection all we can, by beginning early to remember God. For we must not imagine, what some are willing to persuade themselves, that a death-bed repentance will have the same effect upon our minds in our last moments, as a life of early piety or early repentance. They who think so, show themselves to be utter strangers to the real situation of a dying man. They know not the terror and amazement, the fears and apprehensions, of a soul that stands trembling on the brink of eternity, and whose salvation depends on a death-bed repentance. He fears, he knows not what, about the sincerity of that repentance; he fears his contrition may not have been deep enough, his amendment not complete; that some crimes may not have appeared to him in their full guilt and baseness, and some may have entirely escaped his search. He enhances every real danger, and creates to himself a thousand more; and whatever may be the efficacy of that repentance, with regard to his *future* condition, it cannot in his *present* yield him that

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comfortable hope, that humble confidence in the merits of his Redeemer, which is absolutely necessary to the quiet of the mind, in so interesting a point. This can only be the result of a life, in which, upon the most important review, there appears nothing to lament but those frailties and infirmities which man cannot but sometimes fall into, and which God, through the mediation and death of Christ, has most graciously promised to forgive. And in this review, the further we can cast our eyes backwards on our sincere, though imperfect endeavors after holiness, and the nearer we can trace up the beginning of our religious obedience to the beginning of life, the more pleasing will be the retrospect, the more unallayed our satisfaction. Every impulse of passion we have subdued, every temptation we have resisted or escaped, every evil thought we have restrained, and every good one we have encouraged, will then each rise up to befriend us, and speak peace to our affrighted souls. And though the religious young man may now, perhaps, complain of the difficulties he hath to struggle with, yet let him remember, that the bitterer his present sensations are, the more joyful will be his reflections at that momentous period. It is then, in short, and only then, we see the true difference between him that serveth God in his youth, and him that serveth him not; and whoever compares their different circumstances and behavior on that trying occasion, will most sincerely wish "that "he may die the death of the righteous, and that his "latter end may be like his." But let us remember, that it is not a mere inactive *wish* alone that can procure us this inestimable blessing; let us remember, that if we would die the death of the righteous, we must seriously resolve and endeavor from our youth up, to live his life, and that the best preparation for a latter end like his, will be to take care that our early years be like his also.

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SERMON XXVII.

1 KINGS xviii. 21.

And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.

NOTWITHSTANDING the many express commands given to the Jews to worship the one only true God, and the many admirable provisions made in their law to preserve them from the adoration of any other; yet it is notorious, that from the time of their leaving Egypt, down to the Babylonish captivity, they were frequently falling into idolatry. It must be observed, however, that this idolatry of theirs, wicked and inexcusable as it undoubtedly was, did not consist in absolutely renouncing the worship of the true God, but in joining with it the worship of false gods. This they did in imitation of the heathen nations around them, who, like all other pagans, though they had each their peculiar tutelary deities, yet made no scruple of associating those of any other people along with them. In conformity to which accommodating temper, the Jews themselves probably considering the God of Israel as their *national* God, imagined that their allegiance to him was not violated by admitting other local deities to a share in his worship. It was this absurd and impious custom of joining the adoration of idols to that of the true God, against which we find so many precepts and exhortations in the Old Testament directed, and

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such severe punishments denounced. And in opposition to this strange practice it was, that Elijah proposes to the idolatrous Ahab and his people, an effectual method of deciding which was the true God, Jehovah or Baal; and he introduces his proposal with that spirited expostulation, contained in the words of the text. "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord "be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." This was in effect, saying, How long will ye act this base disingenuous part, of attempting to serve two masters, and to worship at once both the Lord and Baal? The Lord is a jealous God, He demands your whole affection, He will not be served by halves; he will not accept of a divided empire with Baal. Chuse ye, then, whom you will serve, and no longer halt between two directly opposite and inconsistent opinions. If you are persuaded (and never had any people more reason to be persuaded) that the Lord Jehovah, the great Creator of Heaven and earth, is the only true God, act agreeably to such persuasion. Follow him, and him only; serve him sincerely, uniformly, and entirely, with all your heart, and soul, and mind, and strength: and live a life of virtue and holiness, in obedience to his commands. But if, on the contrary, you can, in opposition to the plainest and strongest evidence, bring yourselves seriously to believe that Baal is God, follow *him*. Follow him (if your nature recoil not at it) through all those impure and detestable practices which his worship authorizes and requires. But come not thus reeking with idolatry to the altar of the Lord. He will accept of no sacrifices from such polluted hands. Baal is then your God, and you are his people. To him alone offer up your vows; from him only expect the supply of all your wants, and deliverance from all your calamities.

The observation naturally arising from the text thus explained, is this: That as God would not allow a partial worship under the Mosaic dispensation, neither will he admit of partial faith, and partial obedience, under the Christian covenant.

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He who was the God of the Jews, is also the God of the Christians; has from the same invariable pre-eminence of his divine nature, the same claim to our entire and unreserved submission to his will, is equally jealous of his own glory and of our allegiance, and equally averse to any rival in our affections, and our services. It was the duty of the Jew to believe and obey the whole law of Moses. It is the duty of the Christian to believe and obey the whole law of Christ. In opposition to the doctrines and duties of the Mosaic law, stood the extravagant conceits of Gentile theology, and the execrable impurities and barbarities of idolatrous worship. In opposition to the doctrines and duties of the Gospel, stand the fanciful refinements of modern philosophy, and the allurements of a sinful world, which are now too frequently distracting the belief, and dividing the obedience of Christians, as superstition and idolatry did formerly those of the Jews. And it is no more allowable to halt in our belief between deism and revelation, and in our practice between God and Mammon, than it was in the Jews formerly to follow at once both the Lord and Baal. The text, therefore, when divested of all peculiarity of circumstance, and brought home to ourselves, affords this general and useful principle, that we should not waver between two systems, and endeavor to serve at the same time two masters; but entirely devote ourselves either to the one or the other, and stand to all the consequences of our choice. This admonition seems not improperly calculated for the state of Religion among ourselves at this day, and may be applied with equal justice both to our faith and practice.

But I shall, in this discourse, confine my observations almost entirely to the latter, as being the most useful, and the best suited to the business of this place. For although much might be said respecting strange conceits in matters of faith; although there are, it is well known, in this country, as well as in others, a few individuals who think themselves at liberty to select out of the Gospel, for their creed, just what happens to

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suit their particular humor or caprice, and to reject all the rest, and may therefore very justly be said to "halt "between two opinions;" yet the number of these persons is so inconsiderable, and the reception their tenets meet with is so very unpromising, that to bestow much of our attention upon them, would be a very needless waste of time. Much less can it be necessary to enter here into any *confutation* of their fanciful opinions. They have been confuted, most effectually confuted, above seventeen hundred years ago, and that, too, by a book which is, or ought to be, in the hands of every Christian; I mean the Bible. Every page of that sacred volume bears testimony against them; and it is utterly impossible for any man of a plain understanding, and of an unprejudiced mind, to look into the Gospel without perceiving, that all those great and important doctrines, which our philosophic Christians are pleased to reject (and which, in fact, amount to almost every peculiar doctrine of the Gospel, except that of the resurrection) are taught and repeatedly inculcated in the sacred writings, in terms as clear, explicit, and unequivocal, as it is in the power of language to express. They are, in fact, so interwoven with the very frame and constitution, with the entire substance and essence of Christianity, that they must stand or fall together. They are found in the same Gospel, and are intimately blended and incorporated with those moral precepts, and those evidences of a resurrection and a future state, which are on all sides allowed to be divine; and there is no such thing as separating them from each other, no such thing as dissolving the connection between them, without undermining the whole fabric of Christianity, and defeating the chief purposes for which Christ came into the world.

Let no one, then, that professes himself a disciple of Christ, ever be induced to fluctuate thus between two systems. Let him never listen to any such deceitful terms of accommodation with "the vain phi-"losophy of this world," nor suffer himself to be led away by "the delusions of science, falsely so called."

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He who reject all the Ch nence "halt ap- per-

o maim and mutilate that com- of Christian doctrine, which ether, and compacted by that plieth," that to take away any roy the beauty, strength, and

ice at present for those who, in t, may be said to halt between he Religion of nature and the Religion of Christ. I now hasten to that which is the principal object of this discourse, the *practical* inconsistencies with which some men are chargeable. For, among the professors of our faith, there are too many who, though their speculative opinions may be right and uniform, yet in their practice halt between two opposite modes of conduct, and endeavor to serve at the same time two masters, God and Mammon.

I say nothing here of those who are professedly men of the world, who disclaim all belief in the doctrines of the Gospel, and all obedience to its laws. These men have taken their part, have adopted a system. A miserable one, indeed, it is; but it is, however, a decided one; and whatever other guilt they may be chargeable with, *inconsistence* certainly is not one of their faults.

In this respect the children of this world are in their generation commonly wiser than the children of light, among whom, unfortunately, the same undeviating uniformity of conduct is not often to be found. Of those who acknowledge Christ to be their lord and master, how few are there that adhere to him invariably throughout, without ever revolting from their allegiance, and devoting themselves to another sovereign, "the prince of this world!"

One man finding it said in Scripture, that charity shall cover a multitude of sins, without ever once giving himself the trouble to examine into the true meaning of that doubtful expression, takes refuge under the letter of it, and on the strength of a little ostentatious generosity, indulges every irregular passion

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without control, and fancies himself all the while a serious sober Christian.

A second, rather shocked at this, keeps clear of all gross and flagrant enormities; but hopes that a few secret and less presumptuous sins will be easily forgiven him.

A third, still more modest and more scrupulous, contents himself with one favorite vice, and makes not the least doubt but that his exact observance of the divine law, in other respects, will amply atone for his failure in this single instance.

A fourth advances one step further than this; he indulges himself in no gratification that seems to deserve the name of sin; but, at the same time, allows the gaieties, the amusement, the business or the cares of life, to take entire possession of his soul, to shut out, in a great measure, all thoughts of God and Religion, and steal away his affections from Heaven and heavenly things.

Lastly; there is another class of men who are irreproachable in their morals, and sufficiently temperate, perhaps, in their pursuits of business or of amusement, but yet fall short of that steady and affectionate attachment to their divine Master, which his Religion inculcates, and his kindness demands. They want that zeal and fervor, that earnestness and activity in his service, that absolute resignation to his will, that perfect confidence in his infinite wisdom and goodness, that freedom from all immoderate anxiety and solicitude, hope or fear, exultation or disappointment respecting the various events of the present life, which are the surest and most unequivocal proofs, that this world has little or no share in our affections, but that our treasure is in Heaven, and there is our heart also.

Thus it is, that too many in almost every denomination of professed Christians do, in one way or another, in a greater or less degree, "halt between two opposite rules of life," divide their attention between the commands of Christ, and the criminal, or the trifling enjoyments of the present scene, endeavor to accom-

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modate matters as commodiously as possible, between things temporal and things eternal; and to take as much as they can of this world, without losing their hold on the rewards of the next. But let no man impose on himself with these delusive imaginations. Such duplicity of conduct is as evidently contrary both to the letter and the spirit of Christ's Religion, and as justly obnoxious to the reproof conveyed in the text, as the fault already touched upon of "halting between "two opinions." Whoever looks into the Gospel, with the least degree of attention, must see, that it requires us to give up our whole soul to God, and pay an unreserved and undivided obedience to all his commands. The language of Christianity to its disciples is like that of Solomon in his Proverbs, "My son give "me thine heart*." We are commanded "to set our "affections on things above, and not on things on the "earth: to have our conversation in Heaven; to love "God with all our heart, and soul, and mind, and "strength; to take up our cross and follow Christ; to "leave father, mother, brethren, sisters, houses and "lands, for his name's sake, and the Gospel's†." These, and such like expressions, are, it is well known, perpetually occurring in the sacred writings. And although we are not to understand them so literally, and so rigorously, as to conceive ourselves obliged to renounce the world absolutely, and all its rational and innocent enjoyments, to retire into deserts and caves, and think of nothing but the concerns of eternity; yet, if we allow these phrases *any* meaning, they cannot imply less than this; that our chief and principal concern, beyond all comparison, must be to please and obey our Maker in all things; that we must seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; that we must look up to his law as the great guide and governing principle of our lives; that we must not vibrate perpetually between two masters, between two opposite modes of conduct, between vice and virtue, be-

* Prov. xxiii. 26.

† Col. iii. 2. Phil. iii. 20. Mark xii. 30. Matth. xvi. 24. xix. 29.

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tween piety and pleasure, between inclination and duty, between this life and the next; but devote ourselves heartily and sincerely to the service of our heavenly Father, and suffer no one earthly object to estrange or draw away our affections from him.

The only way, then, for a wise and a good man to take, is to preserve that uniformity and consistence, and dignity of character, both in opinion and in practice, which is in all cases respectable; in the Christian Religion essential and indispensable. You must, in short, as Joshua said to the Jewish people, "you must "chuse, this day, whom you will serve." You must take your part, and adhere to it steadily and invariably throughout.

If, in the first place, with respect to doctrines and matters of belief, you think that you are innocent and perfect creatures, that you stand in need of no Redeemer, no Mediator, no expiation for your past, no assistance for your future conduct; that revelation is needless, and reason alone sufficient for all the good purposes of this life and the next, then follow reason, and be consistent with yourselves. Do not repose the least part of your hopes on Christ. You have nothing to do with him or his Gospel. You can claim nothing under his name; by your own merits you must stand or fall; must go boldly and with confidence up to the throne of God, and demand from his justice, as a matter of right, that pardon and those rewards which you disdain to receive from his mercy as a matter of grace. But if your minds revolt against such presumption as this; if you feel yourselves corrupt and sinful, the children of vanity and the sport of passions, continually transgressing the dictates even of your own reason, and of course continually deserving punishment from the Giver of that reason; if you find that something more than mere modern philosophy is necessary to heal the depravity of your nature, to reconcile you to an offended God, to assist you in the performance of your duty, to support you under the severest afflictions, and to satisfy the cravings of your soul with that fulness of

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joy which the world, and all the world's wisdom, can never give; if, in fine, you perceive that the Gospel of Christ contains every thing you want, and that the truth of its pretensions is founded on such sort of evidence as no man upon earth was ever yet deceived by trusting to in any other case, then follow Christ; take him for your only guide in religious knowledge, and repose an entire and absolute confidence in his holy word. When once you are persuaded that he is an inspired teacher, and that he and his Religion came from God, no doctrines, however difficult or mysterious, how much soever they transcend reason, if not repugnant to it, will be any obstacles in your way. You will receive them all with implicit reverence and submission, on the sole ground of his testimony. The only question to be asked respecting such doctrines is this: Do they actually exist in the Gospel? Is there sufficient evidence for the authenticity of that Gospel? If there be, and this we have all along supposed, the dispute is decided, and you can no longer hesitate respecting the admission of truths grounded on such authority.

In the same manner, with respect to *practice*. If you admit the reality of a future existence, and a future day of recompence, and if after deliberately comparing this life with the next, you do, in your best and soberest judgment, think that present enjoyments are more valuable than future and eternal happiness, and a little self-denial in this world more insupportable than everlasting misery in the next, then let this world be the sole idol of your hearts; to this devote yourselves without reserve. It would then be folly to sacrifice any pleasures, any advantages to the commands of your Maker, or to let one thought about futurity disturb your tranquillity, or interrupt your pursuits.

But if you find this to be impossible; if you feel yourselves to be designed for immortality; if you cannot forbear looking perpetually forward into futurity; if to these sentiments of Nature, Reason adds her voice, and Revelation confirms it by evidence that is irresisti-

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ble; if, moreover, on a fair estimate of the respective value of things temporal, and things eternal, you are convinced that the pains and the pleasures of this world are not worthy to be compared with the rewards and punishments of the next; if, in fine, the limited nature of the human faculties, the contrary tempers of mind, and courses of action, which contrary pursuits require, and the express declarations of Christ himself, prove incontestably that we cannot serve God and Mammon, cannot reconcile two opposite modes of conduct together; what, then, is the course which a prudent and considerate man has to take? Why, evidently, to devote himself absolutely and entirely to the service of his one Lord and Master, and to suffer nothing to interfere with that great object of his attention. If there really *is* a future scene of existence, and if the rewards promised to the righteous, and the punishments denounced against the wicked, are as great and as durable as they are represented to be, there is no sacrifice in this life which a wise man would not make to them. If they are worth any thing, they are worth every thing. Be, then, not only almost, but altogether Christians. Let no enticing words of man's wisdom put you out of conceit with the divine truths of the Gospel, and make you halt between two opinions; let no one favorite vice, no worldly pursuits, no vain amusements, draw you off from any part of your duty, and divide your obedience between God and Baal. If you have chosen the other world for your portion, cling not any longer fondly to this; if you have set your hand to the plough, look not back to the vanities you have renounced. Be not irresolute, wavering, and indecisive; be not governed by the opinion of the day, nor the temptation of the moment. Do not so divide yourselves between two masters, as to please neither the one nor the other; do not manage so wretchedly as to lose at once what little this world has to give, and all the glorious rewards which the other holds up to your view. "Chuse ye, in short, "this day, whom ye will serve." If the Lord be

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God, and not Baal, be resolved at once; take a manly and a decided part; fix your affections immoveably on heavenly things; pursue, with unremitting attention, your best and truest interest; give up yourselves, body and soul, into the hands of your Maker, and persevere uniformly in his service to the end of your lives; that having thus finished your course, and kept the faith to the last, you may receive "the prize of your high "calling in Christ Jesus; and when your flesh and "your heart shall fail, may find God to be the strength "of your heart, and your portion for ever."

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SERMON XXVIII*.

PSALM xxii. 28.

The kingdom is the Lord's, and he is the governor among the nations.

THE doctrine conveyed to us in these words is that of A NATIONAL PROVIDENCE; and it is a doctrine no less consonant to reason than consolatory to the human mind. It must therefore afford us the highest satisfaction, to find this truth confirmed by the sacred writers in the clearest and the strongest terms. The Scriptures are full of the most gracious promises to righteous nations, and of the most dreadful denunciations against wicked and impenitent kingdoms; and it is well known, that neither these promises nor these threatenings were vain. The history of the Jewish people, more especially, is scarce any thing else than the history of God's providential interposition to punish or reward them, according as they obeyed or disobeyed his laws. And although we should admit that on account of the peculiar circumstances of that people, and the unexampled form of their theoretic government, their case cannot be drawn into a parallel with that of other nations, yet there are not wanting some which may. Those four celebrated empires of antiquity which rose up one after another, and successively filled the world with astonishment and terror, were nothing more than mighty engines in the hand of God to execute his various dispensations of mercy or of justice on the Jewish nation, and other civil communities; and

* Preached before the House of Lords, January 30, 1778.

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to prepare the way gradually for the introduction of another kingdom of a very different nature, and superior to them all. Their rise and fall were predicted in the sacred writings long before they existed*, and those extraordinary personages, Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, Alexander, Augustus, Vespasian, and Titus, were, though unknown to themselves, the AGENTS of the Almighty, raised up at certain appointed times, and furnished with every requisite qualification to "perform all his pleasure†," and fulfil his views. "I am "the Lord that maketh all things; that stretcheth "forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the "earth by myself; that frustrateth the tokens of the "lyars, and maketh diviners mad; that turneth wise "men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish; "that confirmeth the word of his servant, and performeth the counsel of his messengers. I form the "light and create darkness; I make peace and create "evil: I THE LORD DO ALL THESE THINGS‡." Thus we see, that what is considered as the common vicissitude of human affairs, peace and war, pestilence and famine, political changes and national revolutions, the passions of the wicked, the machinations of the crafty, the virtues of the good, the errors of the weak, the prudence of the wise, the shining qualities of the great; every thing, in short, that the world calls accident, chance and fortune, are all, in fact, under the control of an invisible and over-ruling hand; which, without any violation of the laws of nature, or the freedom of human actions, renders them subservient to the gracious purposes of divine wisdom in the government of the world.

In the instance above adduced of the four great monarchies, we see this sublime truth exemplified in the most striking manner. They form as it were, one vast map of providential administration, delineated on so large a scale, and marked with such legible characters, that they cannot well escape our notice. But al-

* Daniel vii. and viii. † Isaiah xliv. 28.

‡ Isaiah xliv. 24, 25, 26; and xlv. 7.

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though this is very properly hung up for the observation of mankind in general, yet there are other examples of a national Providence which to us may be more interesting, as coming more home to ourselves. We of this kingdom have been most remarkably favored with the visible protection of Heaven; and there are in our own history so many plain and unequivocal marks of a divine interference, that if we do not acknowledge it, we are either the blindest or the most ungrateful people on earth. Let me more particularly call your attention to the following very singular circumstances, in some of the greatest events that dignify the annals of this country.

Our separation from the church of Rome was begun by the passions of a prince, who meant nothing less than that reformation of Religion which was the consequence of it. The total dispersion and overthrow of what was profanely called the invincible Armada, was effected almost entirely by winds and tempests. That dreadful popish conspiracy, which seemed guarded by impenetrable darkness and silence against all possibility of detection, was at last casually discovered by a letter equally indiscreet and obscure. At a time when there appeared no hope of ever recovering our ancient form of government, it suddenly rose from the ruins in which the tragedy of this day had involved it; under the auspices of a man who had helped to destroy it, and who seemed almost to the last moment undecided whether he should restore or destroy it again. And to crown all, our deliverance in a subsequent reign from the attempts of a gloomy tyrant to enslave both body and soul, was brought about by a concurrence of the most surprising incidents co-operating, at that very critical moment on which the whole depended, with the noblest efforts of true patriotism. Let now the hardiest sceptic consider only these few remarkable facts, selected from a multitude of others scarce less extraordinary, and then let him deny, if he can, the evident traces they bear stamped upon them of SOME SUPERIOR POWER.

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It may seem, indeed, as if the very times to which the present solemnity carries back our thoughts, were a contradiction to the doctrine here advanced, were a strong and melancholy proof that God's providential care was then at least withdrawn, and "the light of his "countenance turned away" from this island. The murder of a virtuous though misguided prince, and the total subversion of the constitution, may be thought utterly inconsistent with the notion of a divine superintendence. But it is not surely to be expected, that throughout the whole duration of a great empire, any more than throughout the whole life of an individual, there is to be one uninterrupted course of prosperity and success. Admonitions and checks, corrections and punishments, may be, and undoubtedly are, in both cases sometimes useful, perhaps essentially necessary; and the care and even kindness of Providence may be no less visible in these salutary severities, than in the distribution of its most valuable blessings.

Both private and public afflictions have a natural tendency to awaken, to alarm, to instruct, to humanize, to meliorate the heart of man; and they may be ultimately attended with other very important and beneficial consequences. This was eminently the case in that turbulent period we are now commemorating. The convulsions into which the nation was then thrown, seem to have been the efforts of a vigorous though at that time disordered constitution; which shaking off in those violent agitations some of its most malignant humors, acquired in the end a degree of health and soundness unknown to it before. These however might, by a skilful management, have been much sooner established. The lenient remedies of LAW AND PARLIAMENTARY AUTHORITY, which were at first applied, had made so great a progress in subduing the maladies of the state, that there was all the encouragement in the world to persevere in that regular and prudent course. But most unfortunately for the nation, it was too hastily relinquished; and in an evil hour recourse was had to that most dangerous and desperate

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of all experiments, which nothing but extreme necessity can justify, MILITARY FORCE.

They who set out with the very best principles, and the purest intentions, were insensibly led by a few artful incendiaries into excesses of which at one time they would have thought themselves utterly incapable. In their haste to reform every thing, they unhappily forgot that the other two branches of the legislature, THE KING AND THE LORDS, had rights as sacred and as essential to the public welfare, as those of the COMMONS; and that it was no less injurious and dangerous to violate the constitution, for the sake of advancing the power of the people, than for the purpose of extending the prerogative of the crown. Heated with those visionary plans which they had formed of absolute perfection in church and state, they thought it allowable to promote such righteous ends by the most unrighteous means; by trampling on all those sacred laws of truth, justice, equity, charity, and humanity, which were undoubtedly meant (however little we may regard that meaning) to govern our *political* as well as *private* conduct: and which can never be transgressed, not even in pursuit of liberty itself, without the most pernicious effects.

No wonder, then, that these effects followed in the present instance, and that the Almighty pursued such unchristian practices with the most exemplary vengeance. It is, indeed, very remarkable, that every one of those parties which bore a share in this miserable contest, king, nobles, commons, puritans, and patriots, were disappointed of their aim, and found every thing fall out the very reverse of what they expected. Each in their turn became the victim of their own devices; and the new race, which sprung up from their dregs, exhibited to the world a most singular but at the same time most instructive spectacle. Instead of that unlimited freedom, temporal and spiritual, which they conceived themselves commissioned by Heaven to establish; confusion and bloodshed, tyranny and anarchy, every folly and every extravagance which enthusiasm

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could engender, followed each other in quick succession. Ashamed and tired of such disgraceful and capricious insults, the nation was at length roused, and with one voice recalled the exiled monarch to the throne. But as if it was meant by Providence that every part of this unexampled scene should hold forth some useful lesson to mankind, it appeared from the conclusion no less than from the whole progress of it, how completely all immoderate vehemence of temper and conduct defeats its own purposes, and by grasping at too much loses every thing. For, as one extreme naturally begets another, excessive rigor to the father produced excessive indulgence to the son; and in one fond moment of joy was lost the fruit of all the preceding struggles against the exorbitant claims and encroachments of the crown.

But when, in the following reign, a different conduct was observed, the event was also different, and Heaven gave its sanction to the glorious work. At that memorable period all the injustice and oppression was on the part of the sovereign, all the forbearance and moderation on the part of the subject. For although the invasions made both on our civil and religious rights, by James the Second, were far bolder and more alarming than those attempted by his unhappy father, yet they produced no hasty, no licentious excess among the people. Every legal, every constitutional mode of redress was first tried, and when those failed of success, more vigorous and efficacious measures became necessary. Yet even these were conducted with the most consummate prudence and circumspection; and the wisdom, the calmness, the firmness, the temper, the sobriety, with which our illustrious ancestors proceeded on that occasion, form a most striking contrast to the rashness, the passion, the wild impetuosity, the fanatic fury, with which Cromwell and his associates set themselves to tear up the abuses of government, and government itself along with them, by the roots. The great authors of THE REVOLUTION, on the contrary, disdaining all the usual artifices of faction to inflame

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and mislead the multitude, and leaving every one to his own natural sense and feeling of the injuries he sustained; without calumny or falsehood, without invective or misrepresentation, without the horrors of a civil war, without a single battle, almost without the loss of a single life, effected every thing they wished. Because both the end they pursued, and the means they employed, were reasonable and just, Providence crowned their efforts with success, and gave them the glory of establishing the rights of the people, not on the ruins of the constitution, but on the nice adjustment and exact counterpoise of all its several component parts.

We have then the strongest reason to conclude, that there is a Power on high which watches over the fate of nations, and which has in a more especial manner, in a manner plainly distinguishable from the ordinary course of events, and the common effects of human policy and foresight, preserved this kingdom in the most critical and perilous circumstances*. Does not this then afford some ground to hope, that if we endeavor to render ourselves worthy of the divine protection, it will be once more extended to us; and that by a speedy and effectual reformation of our hearts and lives, we may remove or lighten those heavy judgments which our iniquities have now most justly drawn down upon us. This, I know, is holding a language which they who compliment themselves with the name of PHILOSOPHERS will treat with sovereign contempt. But let them enjoy their triumph; and let them allow us, who think Christianity the best philosophy, to console ourselves, amidst the gloom that at present surrounds us, with those reviving hopes which the belief

* I have often observed, (says an eloquent writer) that "when the fulness and maturity of time is come that produces the greater convulsions "and changes in the world, it usually pleases God to make it appear, by the "*manner* of them, that they are not the effects of human force or policy, "but of the divine justice and predestination. And though we see a man "*striking as it were, the hour* of that fulness of time, yet our reason must "needs be convinced, that his hand is moved by some secret, and, to us "who stand without, invisible direction." *Cowley's Discourse on the Government of Oliver Cromwell.*

This observation is, I apprehend, strictly applicable to those instances of INVISIBLE DIRECTION which have been here produced.

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of God's providential government presents to us*. If this be superstition, it is so delightful a superstition, that it would be inhuman to deprive us of it. But we *know* in whom we trust; we know that this trust rests on a foundation which cannot be shaken. It rests, as we have seen, not only on the express declarations and promises of holy writ, but on the many remarkable instances of a supernatural agency which occur in the history of mankind, and above all in our own. In every one of the extraordinary national deliverances above-mentioned, the dangers that threatened this island were of a much greater magnitude, and more formidable aspect, than those which now seem to alarm us. Why, then, may we not again indulge ourselves with the same expectations? A series of past favors naturally begets a presumption of their continuance; and it must not be wholly imputed to the laudable partiality which every honest man entertains for his own country, if we give way to a persuasion, that God will still vouchsafe his accustomed goodness to this favored land. Yes, we *will* sooth ourselves with the belief, that a nation so distinguished as this has been with happier revolutions, and greater blessings, than any other ever experienced, will not be at this time deserted by its gracious Benefactor and Protector. It is here that civil liberty has fixed her throne; it is here that Protestantism finds its firmest support; it is here that the divine principle of toleration is established; it is here that a provision is made by government for the poor; it is here that they are with a boundless munificence relieved both by private charity and public institutions; it is here, in fine, that the laws are equal, wise and good; that they are administered by men of acknowledged ability, and unimpeached integrity; and that through their hands the stream of justice flows with a purity unknown in any other age or nation. Nor have we only the happiness of enjoying these unspeakable advanta-

* We may, I trust, on the same grounds, entertain even now the same reviving hopes. Indeed much of the reasoning made use of in this discourse applies most remarkably to the present circumstances of this country.

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ges ourselves; we have had the glory (a glory superior to all conquests, to all triumphs) of diffusing a large proportion of them over the remotest regions of the globe. Wherever our discoveries, our commerce or our arms have penetrated, they have in general carried the laws, the freedom, and the religion, of this country along with them. Whatever faults and errors we may be chargeable with in other respects, for these gifts at least, the most invaluable that one country can bestow upon another, it is not improbable that both the eastern and the western world may one day acknowledge that they were *originally* indebted to this kingdom. Is it then a vain, is it a delusive imagination, that after having been made the chosen instruments of Providence for such noble, such beneficial purposes, there is some degree of felicity still in reserve for us, and that the illustrious part we have been appointed to act on the great theatre of the world is not yet accomplished; What may be in the councils of THE MOST HIGH; *what mighty changes* he may be now meditating in the system of human affairs, he alone can tell*. But in the midst of this awful suspence, while the fate of empires hangs trembling on his resolves, of one thing at least we are absolutely certain; that it is better to have him for our friend than our enemy. Which of the two he shall be, depends entirely upon ourselves. If by our infidelity, our impiety, our libertinism, our ill-timed gaiety and wanton profuseness in the very face of public distress, we audaciously insult his admonitions, and brave his utmost vengeance; what else can we expect but that every thing which ought naturally to be the means of our stability, will be converted into instruments of our destruction? That immense dominion, of which we shall then be no longer worthy, will be gradually rent away from us; and it may even become necessary for the welfare of mankind, to cut off our communication with distant coun-

* What *mighty changes* in the system of human affairs have since this period (1778) actually taken place both in America and in Europe, the reader need not be informed.

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tries, lest they be infected with the contagion of our sins. But if, on the contrary, by reverencing the judgments of God, and returning to that allegiance which we owe him, we again put ourselves under his protection; he may still, as he has often done, dispel the clouds that hang over us: or if, for wise reasons, he suffer them to gather and darken upon us, he may make even this in the final result, conduce to our real welfare.

There is, in fact, no calamity, private or public, which under his gracious direction, may not eventually prove a blessing. There are no losses, but that of his favor, which ought to sink us into despair. There is a spirit in freedom, there is an energy in virtue, there is a confidence in Religion, which will enable those that possess them, and those only, to rise superior to every disaster. It is not a boundless extent of territory, nor even of commerce, that is essential to public prosperity. They are necessary, indeed, to national greatness, but not to national felicity. The true wealth, the true security of a kingdom consists in frugality, industry, temperance, fortitude, probity, piety, unanimity. Great difficulties, more especially, call for great talents and great virtues. It is in times such as these that we look for those noble examples of SELF-DENIAL and PUBLIC SPIRIT, which bespeak true greatness of mind, which have sometimes saved kingdoms, and immortalized individuals. Let, then, all the wise and the good in every party and denomination of men among us (for they are in every one to be found) stand forth in the present exigency as one man, to advise, direct, assist, and befriend their country; and as the Roman triumvers gave up each his friend for the *destruction* of the state, let every one now give up his favorite prejudices, systems, interest, resentments, and connections, for the *preservation* of it. Let us not, for God's sake, let us not waste that time in tearing and devouring one another, which ought to be employed in providing for the general welfare. Unjust suspicious, uncandid interpretations, mutual reproaches, and

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endless altercations, can answer no other purpose but to embitter our minds, and multiply the very evils we all wish to remove. From beginnings such as these arose the calamities we are now met to deplore; and the conclusion was, not liberty, but tyranny in the extreme. Can there possibly be a stronger motive for us to moderate our dissensions, and compose our passions, before they grow too big for us to manage and control? On the same bottom are we all embarked, and if, in the midst of our angry contentions, the vessel perish, we must all perish, with it. It is therefore our common interest, as it is our common duty, to unite in guarding against so fatal an event. There can be no danger of it but from ourselves. Our worst, our most formidable enemies, are our own personal vices and political distractions. Let harmony inspire our councils, and Religion sanctify our hearts, and we have nothing to fear. PEACE ABROAD is undoubtedly a most desirable object. But there are two things still more so, PEACE WITH ONE ANOTHER, and PEACE WITH GOD.

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SERMON XXIX.

LUKE iv. 32.

And they were astonished at his doctrine; for his word was with power.

IT is evident from this, and many other similar passages of the New Testament, that our blessed Lord's discourses made a very uncommon and wonderful impression on the minds of his hearers. We are told, in various places, "that the common people heard "him gladly; that they wondered at the gracious "words which proceeded out of his mouth, and de-"clared, with one voice, that never man spake like "this man*." Expressions of this sort, which continually occur in relation to our Saviour's preaching, we never find applied in Scripture to any other teacher of Religion; neither to the prophets who preceded, nor to the apostles that followed him. And we may be sure, that the effects of his doctrine must have been very extraordinary indeed, when it could draw such strong language as this from the Evangelists, who, in general, express themselves with much calmness and simplicity; and frequently describe the most astonishing miracles, and deliver the sublimest doctrines, without any apparent emotion, or remarkable energy of diction.

What, then, could it be which gave such surprizing force to our Saviour's instructions, such power

* Mark xii. 37. Luke iv. 22. John vii. 29.

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to his words? He employed none of those rhetorical artifices and contrivances, those bold figures and unexpected strokes of overbearing eloquence, which the most celebrated *worldly* orators have generally made use of, to inflame the passions and gain the admiration of the multitude. These, certainly, were not the instruments employed by our Saviour to command attention. The causes of these surprizing effects which his preaching produced, were of a very different nature. Some of these I shall endeavor to enumerate and illustrate as concisely as I can.

1. The first was, the infinite importance and dignity of the subjects he discoursed upon. He did not, like many ancient and many modern philosophers, consume his own time, and that of his hearers, with idle, fruitless speculations, with ingenious essays, and elaborate disquisitions on matters of no real use or moment, with scholastic distinctions, and unintelligible refinements; nor did he, like the Jewish rabbins, content himself with dealing out ceremonies and traditions, with discoursing on mint and cummin, and estimating the breadth of a phylactery; but he drew off the attention of his followers from these trivial, contemptible things, to the greatest and noblest objects that could engage the notice, or interest the heart of man.

He taught, in the first place, the existence of one supreme Almighty Being, the creator, preserver and governor of the universe. To this great Being he taught men how to pray, to worship him in spirit and in truth, in holiness and purity of life. He laid open all the depravity of human nature; he pointed out the only effectual remedy for it; belief in himself, the way, the truth, and the life; repentance and amendment; an entire and absolute renovation of heart, and unreserved submission to the will and the law of God.

The morality he taught was the purest, the soundest, the sublimest, the most rational, the most perfect, that had ever before entered into the imagination, or proceeded from the lips of man. And the uniform tendency of all his doctrines, and all his precepts, was

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to make the whole human race virtuous and happy; to compose them into resignation and content; to inspire them with sentiments of justice, equity, mildness, moderation, compassion, and affection towards each other; and to fill them with sure hope and trust in God for pardon of their sins, on most equitable terms, and the assistance of his holy spirit to regulate their future conduct.

And, finally, to give irresistible force to his commands, he added the most awful sanctions, the doctrines of a future resurrection, a day of judgment and of retribution, a promise of eternal reward to the good, and a denunciation of the most tremendous punishments to the wicked.

2. Such was the general *matter* of his instructions; and, in the next place, his *manner* of conveying them was no less excellent, and no less conducive to their success.

What, for instance, could be more noble, more affecting, than the very first opening of his divine commission? "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, be-"cause he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to "the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-heart-"ed, to preach deliverance to the captives, and reco-"vering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that "are bruised; to preach the acceptable year of the "Lord*."

These were the gracious declarations with which he began his ministry, and in the same spirit he continued it to the very last. Though he invited all men, without distinction, high and low, rich and poor, to embrace the gracious offers of salvation; yet he addressed himself principally to the ignorant, the indigent, the publican, and the sinner. "He broke not "the bruised reed, nor quenched the smoaking flax†;" that is, he bore not hard on any that were bowed down with a sense of their unworthiness, nor extinguished by discouragement the faintest spark of returning virtue; but, on the contrary, invited to him those "that

* Luke iv. 18. † Matth. xii. 20.

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"were heavy laden with sin, that he might give them "rest."

His discourses were perfectly adapted to these gracious purposes. They were mild, tender, encouraging. They were such as the most learned and best informed might listen to with benefit and delight, yet such as the weakest and most ignorant might easily comprehend. He did not deliver a regular, dry, methodical system of ethics, nor did he enter into all the little minute divisions and subdivisions of virtue. But he laid down in the first place, the two great leading fundamental principles of love to God, and love to mankind, and thence deduced, as occasions presented themselves, and incidents occurred, which gave peculiar force and energy to his instructions, all the principal duties respecting God, our neighbor, and ourselves. Whenever he made use of the common didactic method, as in his discourse from the mount, the doctrines he taught, and the precepts he delivered, were short, sententious, solemn, important, full of wisdom and of dignity, yet intelligible and clear. But sensible how much this formal mode of teaching was apt to weary the attention, and die away out of the memory, he added two others, much better calculated to make deep and lasting impressions on the mind. The first was, conveying his instructions under the cover of similitudes and parables, drawn from the most obvious appearances of nature, or the most familiar occurrences of life. The other was the use of certain significant emblematic actions, such as that of washing his disciples' feet, by which he expressed his meaning more clearly and emphatically than by any words he could have employed for that purpose.

3. Another circumstance which gave force and efficacy to our Saviour's preaching was, that he appeared to be perfectly *impartial*, and to have no respect to persons. He reproved vice in every station, wherever he found it with the same freedom and boldness. He paid no court either to the multitude on the one hand, or to the great and wealthy on the other. Though he

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ate and drank, and conversed with publicans and sinners, yet it was not to encourage and indulge them in their vices, but to reprove and correct them; it was because they were sick, and wanted a physician, and that physician he was. In the same manner, while he taught the people to render unto Cæsar the things that were Cæsars, to honor those to whom honor was due, and to pay all proper respect and obedience to those who sat in Moses' seat, yet this did not prevent him from rebuking the Elders and the Rulers, the Scribes and the Pharisees, with the greatest plainness, and with the utmost severity, for their hypocrisy and insincerity, their rapacity and extortion, their zeal for trifles, and their neglect of the weightier matters of the law.—This intrepidity and impartiality in his instructions, and in the distribution of his censures and his admonitions, evidently shewed that he had no private ends to serve, that the salvation of men was his *only* object, and that he was not to be deterred from pursuing it by the fear of consequences. All which could not fail to impress his followers with the utmost respect, awe, and reverence, both for his person and his doctrines.

4. Every one that hopes to work any material change, any effectual reformation in the hearts of those whom he addresses, must endeavor to find out, as well as he is able, their real sentiments and habits of thinking, their tempers and dispositions, their peculiar failings and infirmities, their secret wickednesses, and unwitnessed transgressions.

There are a thousand artifices by which men are able to conceal their corruption and depravity from the eyes of others, and sometimes, alas! even from their own. And it has been affirmed by some very sagacious observers of human nature, that no one ever yet discovered the bottom of his heart, even to his most intimate and bosom friend. But it was impossible for any wickedness, however secret, or however artfully disguised, to escape the all-seeing eye of the Son of God. He saw, at one glance, the inmost recesses of the soul. He discovered every thought as it rose in

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the mind. He detected every irregular desire before it ripened into action. Hence he was always enabled to adapt his discourses to the particular circumstances and situation of every individual that heard him, and to apply such remedies, and give such directions, as the peculiar exigences of their case required. Hence, too, his answers to their questions and enquiries were frequently accommodated more to what they thought, than what they said; and we find them going away from him astonished, at perceiving that he was perfectly well acquainted with every thing that passed within their breasts; and filled with admiration of a teacher possessed of such extraordinary powers, to whom all hearts were open, and from whom no secrets were hid. It is evident what a command this must give him over the affections of his hearers, and what attention and obedience it must secure to all his precepts and exhortations.

5. The same effects must, in some degree, be produced by the various proofs he gave of the most perfect wisdom in solving the difficulties that were proposed to him, and of the most consummate prudence and address, in escaping all the snares that were laid for him. Even when he was but twelve years of age, he was able to converse and to dispute with the most learned expounders of the law, and all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and his answers. Afterwards, during the whole course of his ministry, the Rulers, and Scribes, and Pharisees, that is, the men of the greatest learning and ability amongst the Jews were perpetually endeavoring to entangle him in his talk, to perplex and harass him with insidious questions, and to draw him into absurd conclusions, and hazardous situations. But he constantly found means to disengage himself both from the dilemma and the danger; to form his determinations with such exquisite sagacity and judgment, and sometimes to propose to them, in his turn, difficulties so much beyond their ingenuity to clear up, that they generally "marvelled, and left him, "and went their way. Not one amongst them was

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"able to answer him; neither durst any man, from "that day forth, ask him any more questions."

6. It is evident to reason, and it is confirmed by invariable experience, that the purest and the sublimest precepts, if not enforced by a correspondent example in the teacher, will avail but little with the generality of mankind. It is equally certain, that there scarce ever existed a public instructor, whose practice, however laudable in general, did not fall far below the rules he prescribed to others, and to himself.

Here our blessed Lord stood unrivalled and alone: he, and he only, of all the sons of men, acted up in every the minutest instance to what he taught; and exhibited, in his own person, a perfect model of every virtue he inculcated. He commanded, for instance, his disciples "to love God with all their heart, and "soul, and mind, and strength*," and in conformity to this law, he himself manifested, through his whole conduct, the most ardent love for his heavenly Father, the most fervent zeal for his honor and glory, for the advancement of his Religion, and the establishment of his kingdom throughout the earth. His meat and drink, indeed, was to do the will of him that sent him. He commanded them again "to love their neighbor "as themselves†;" and his own life was one continued exercise of love, kindness, and compassion to the whole human race. He required them to be meek, humble, gentle, and peaceable to all men‡. And how did he teach them this important lesson? "Learn of "me," says he, "for I am meek and lowly, and ye "shall find rest unto your souls‖." He exacted of them the most unblemished purity and sanctity of manners; a severe demand! but he had a right to make it; for he himself was "pure, holy, harmless, and un-"defiled: he did no sin, neither was guile found in his "mouth§." He enjoined them to "deny themselves "and take up their cross¶." But it was to follow *him* who had denied himself almost every comfort and con-

* Mark xii. 30. † Matth. xix. 19. ‡ Tit. iii. 2
‖ Matt. xi. 29. § Heb. vii. 26. 1 Pet. ii. 22. ¶ Matt. xvi. 24.

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venience of life; and for the joy that was set before him, "endured the cross, and despised the shame" of an ignominious death*. He required them "to love "their enemies, to bless those that cursed them, and "pray for those that despitefully used and persecuted "them†." A hard saying this, and of all others, perhaps, the most revolting to human nature. But how could they refuse to give even this last and most painful proof of their obedience, who saw that their divine Master, when he was reviled, reviled not again; but, in the very midst of his agony, prayed for his enemies and persecutors‡.

No wonder that every word from such a teacher as this should sink deep into the hearts of all who heard them, and engage their affections, as well as convince their understandings.

7, and lastly. To the influence of example, he added the authority of a DIVINE TEACHER.

The best and wisest of the ancient philosophers could do nothing more than give *good advice* to their followers; and we all know, from sad experience, what mere advice will do against strong passions, established habits, and inveterate corruptions.

But our great Lawgiver, on the contrary, delivered all his doctrines, and all his precepts, in the name of GOD. He spoke in a tone of superiority and command, which no one before him had the courage or the right to assume.

He called himself the SON OF GOD; and he constantly supported, in his words as well as in his actions, the dignity and the divinity of that high character. Not to mention all his astonishing miracles, he showed even in his discourses, that "all power in Heaven and "in earth was given unto him, and that he and his Fa"ther were one‖." In the very beginning of his sermon on the mount, to the poor in spirit, to the merciful, to the pure in heart, to the peace-makers, and many other descriptions of men, he took upon him to

* Heb. xii. 2. † Matt. v. 44. ‡ 1 Pet. ii. 23. Luke xxiii. 34.
‖ Matth. xxviii. 18. John x. 30.

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promise the kingdom of Heaven*. When he was exposing the vain traditions of the elders, he opposed to their feeble reasonings, and miserable casuistry, his own authoritative edict. "But *I* say unto you, swear "not at all; *I* say unto you, resist not evil; *I* say "unto you, love your enemies†." When the Pharisees rebuked his disciples for plucking the ears of corn on the Sabbath, he silenced them with declaring, "that "the Son of Man was Lord also of the Sabbath‡." When he healed diseases, his language was, "I will; "be thou clean‖." When he forgave sins, "be of "good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee. Thy faith "hath made thee whole. Go in peace, and sin no "more§." And when he gives a description of the last day, he represents himself as an Almighty Sovereign, sitting on the throne of his glory, with all the inhabitants of the earth standing before him, to whom he distributes everlasting rewards and everlasting punishments, according to their deserts¶. Well then, might they say of him, "that his word was with "power, and that he taught them as one having au"thority, and not as the Scribes**."

These, then, were the principal causes which gave such force and success to our Saviour's instruction, and compelled even his enemies to acknowledge, that, "never man spake as he spake." The consequence "was that all men sought him," and all who heard him, and were not blinded by their prejudices, "forsook their "sins, and followed him††." It is evidently *our* duty to do the same: for the same causes, which gave such efficacy to our Saviour's preaching, do in a great degree still subsist in the Gospel, and ought to produce the same effects. In one respect, indeed, we fall short of those who heard him. He is not personally present with us, nor has he "taught in our streets." Here it must be owned the first disciples had some advantage over us. They who had the happiness to see and to

* Matt. v. 3. 12.
† Matth. v. 34, 39, 44.
‡ Mark ii. 28.
‖ Matth. viii. 3.
§ Matth. ix. 2. Mark v. 34.
¶ Matth. xxv. 31.
** Matth. vii. 29.
†† Luke iv. 42. Mark i. 18.

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hear him, whose senses were charmed, whose hearts were subdued by the venerable mildness of his look, the gracious majesty of his gestures, the awfully pleasing sound of his voice, to whom all he had said and done, with the very manner of his saying and doing it, was occurring every moment, and continually present in reality or in imagination; these, undoubtedly, must be moved and affected to a degree of which we can hardly form any just conception. Yet still his words carry a divine power along with them, sufficient to convince every understanding, and to subdue every heart that is not hardened against conviction. We have still before our eyes, in the histories of the Evangelists, the sublime and heavenly doctrines which he delivered, the parables he uttered, the significant actions he made use of, the instructions and the reproofs he gave to sinners of every denomination, the triumphs he obtained over the most artful and insidious of his enemies, the unrivalled purity and perfection of his example, the divine authority and dignity with which he spoke, the awful punishments he denounced against those who rejected, and the eternal rewards he promised to those who received his words. These things still remain, and must for ever remain; must for ever give irresistible force and energy to every word that is recorded as proceeding from the mouth of Christ, and must render it "quick and powerful, and sharper than a two-edged "sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul "and spirit*." If eloquence, such as this, does not make a deep, and lasting, and vital impression upon our souls; if we do not find it to be, indeed, the power of God unto salvation, we shall be left without excuse. Let us then, in the language of our church, most earnestly beseech Almighty God, that those sacred words which we have now, or at any other time, heard with our outward ears, may, through his grace be so grafted inwardly in our hearts, that they may bring forth in us the fruit of good living, to the honor and praise of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

* Heb. iv. 12.

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SERMON XXX*.

Luke vii. 22.

Then Jesus answering, said unto them, go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached.

YOU will immediately recollect the occasion on which these words were spoken. They make a part of the answer which our Saviour gave to the two disciples, whom John the Baptist sent to him, to ask whether he was the Great Deliverer that was to come, or they were to look for another. The whole passage is a remarkable one, and affords ample matter for observation; but the particular circumstance to which I mean to draw your attention at present, is the last clause of the text, in which we are told, that "to the "poor the Gospel is preached."

That our Lord should appeal to the miracles which he had wrought before the eyes of the two disciples, as an incontestible proof that he was the Messiah, will be thought very natural and proper; but that he should immediately subjoin to this, as an *additional* proof; and a proof on which he seems to lay as much stress as on the other, that "to the poor the Gospel was preach-"ed," may appear, at the first view, a little extraordinary. We shall, however, soon be satisfied that in

* Preached at the Yearly Meeting of the Charity Schools, in the Cathedral Church of St. Paul, May 2, 1782.

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this, as well as in every other instance, our divine Master acted with consummate wisdom. He was speaking to Jews. His object was to convince them, that he was the MESSIAH. The obvious way of doing this was to shew, that he corresponded to the description which their own prophets gave of that great personage. Now *they* speak of him as one, who should not only give eyes to the blind, ears to the deaf, feet to the lame, and speech to the dumb, but should also "preach good tidings to the meek and the poor*." These were two distinct and separate marks by which he was to be known, and it was therefore as proper and necessary for our Saviour to refer to the one as to the other. Whoever pretended to be the MESSIAH, must unite in himself these two great discriminating peculiarities, which, taken together, form one of the most illustrious and beneficent characters that can be imagined; a character distinguished by the communication of the greatest of all earthly blessings to two descriptions of men, who stood most in need of assistance, *the diseased, and the poor*. To the former, the promised Saviour of the world was to give *health;* to the latter, *spiritual instruction*. In this manner was the great Redeemer marked out by the prophets, and this glorious distinction did Christ display and support in his own person throughout the whole course of his ministry.

That he was infinitely superior to every other teacher of religion in the number, and the benevolent nature of his miracles, is well known; and that he was no less distinguished by the circumstance of "preaching "to the poor;" that there was no one either before or after him, who made it his peculiar business to instruct them, and paid such constant and condescending attention to them as he did, is equally certain. The ancient prophets were usually sent to kings and princes, to the rich and the great, and many of their prophecies were couched in sublime figurative language, beyond the comprehension of the vulgar. There were, in-

* Isaiah xxix. 18, 19. xxxv. 5, 6. lxi. 1.

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deed, other parts of the Jewish scriptures sufficiently plain and intelligible, and adapted to all capacities; but even these the rabbies and the scribes, the great expounders of the law among the Jews, contrived to perplex and darken, and render almost useless by their vain traditions, their absurd glosses, and childish interpretations. So far were they from showing any particular regard or tenderness to the common people, that they held them in the utmost contempt; they considered them as *accursed**, because they knew not that law, which they themselves took care to render impenetrably obscure to them. "They took away the key "of knowledge; they entered not in themselves, and "those that were entering in they hindered†." It was even a proverbial saying among them, "that the Spirit "of God did not rest but upon a rich man‡." So different were the maxims of the great Jewish teachers from the sentiments and conduct of that heavenly Instructor, who openly declared, and gloried in the declaration, that he came "to preach the Gospel to the "poor‖."

Nor did the lower ranks of mankind meet with better treatment in the heathen world. There were among the ancient Pagans, at different periods, and in different countries, many excellent moral writers of fine talents and profound knowledge; but their compositions were calculated not for the illiterate and the indigent, but for men of ability and erudition like themselves. They thought the poor below their notice or regard; they could not stoop so low as to accommodate themselves to the understanding of the vulgar. Their ambition, even in their ethical treatises, was to please the learned few. To these the Dialogues of

* John vii. 48, 49. † Luke xi. 52. ‡ Grotius on Matth. xi. 5.

‖ It may be alleged, that by *the poor*, to whom our Lord preached the Gospel, the sacred writers meant not the poor *in circumstances*, but the poor *in spirit*. The truth is, they meant both; by our Saviour's conduct both senses were equally verified; and these two sorts of *poverty* are so frequently found united, that it is scarce necessary, at least in the present instance, to distinguish between them. For more complete satisfaction on this and some other points (of which but a very imperfect view is given here) see Bishop Hurd's admirable sermon on Matth. v. 3. s. 8.

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Plato, the Ethics of Aristotle, the Offices of Cicero, the Morals of Seneca and of Plutarch, might afford both entertainment and information; but had they been read to a Grecian or a Roman peasant, he would not, I conceive, have found himself either much enlightened or much improved by them. How should *he* get wisdom from such sources "that holdeth the plough, and "that glorieth in the goad; that driveth oxen, and is "occupied in their labors; that giveth his mind to "make furrows, and is diligent to give the kine fod-"der*." Very different occupations these from the studies of the philosopher or the metaphysician, and not very well calculated to prepare the mind for the lectures of the academy, the lyceum, or the portico.

The truth is, there was not a single book of morality at that time written solely or principally for the use of the ignorant and the poor; nor had they their duty explained to them in any other mode of instruction adapted to their capacities. They had no lessons of conduct given them so plain, so familiar, so forcible, so authoritative, as those which are now regularly dispensed to every Christian congregation; nothing that made the smallest approach to our Saviour's divine discourses, (especially that from the Mount) to the ten commandments, to the other moral parts of the Old and New Testament, or to the practical instructions and exhortations given weekly to the people by the ministers of the Gospel. They were left to form a system of morality for themselves as well as they could; in which they were so far from being assisted by their national Religion, that both the mode and the objects of their worship, were of themselves sufficient to corrupt their hearts, and to counteract any right opinions or virtuous inclinations that might casually spring up in their minds.

In this situation did our blessed Lord find the inferior class of mankind when he entered upon his ministry. He found them without guide, instructor, counsellor, or friend. He saw them (to use the affecting

* Eccles. xxxviii. 25, 26.

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language of Scripture) " fainting and scattered abroad " as sheep having no shepherd, and he had compassion " upon them*." He took them instantly under his protection, he shared with them the miseries of their condition. He assumed the form of a servant, submitted to all the hardships of that situation, and frequently " had not even where to lay his head." Although he did not *reject* the wealthy and the great, but, on the contrary, received them with the utmost kindness, whenever they showed any marks of a right and teachable disposition, yet " not *many* noble, not *many* mighty, " were at first called†." It was from among fishermen and mechanics that he chose his companions and apostles. It was to the poor he chiefly addressed his discourses. With these he principally lived and conversed; and to their understandings was the greater part of his parables, his allusions, his reasonings, his precepts, and his exhortations, most kindly accommodated.

Thus did our heavenly Instructor most exactly fulfil the predictions of the prophets and his own declarations that he would evangelize to the poor. The consequence was what might naturally be expected from a measure as full of wisdom as it was of humanity, although totally opposite to the usual practice of moral teachers. In a short space of time that Gospel, which was at first preached more particularly to the poor, was embraced also by the rich; and became, in a few centuries, the established Religion of the most powerful and extensive empire in the world, as it now is of all the most civilized and most enlightened kingdoms of the earth. Whereas the renowned sages of antiquity, by pursuing a contrary course, by making it their only object to please, amuse, and inform the learned and the great, were never able, with all their wisdom and eloquence to enlighten or reform a single province, or even a single city of any note or magnitude‡.

* Matth. ix. 36. † 1 Cor. i. 26.

‡ Hence it is obvious to remark, how very unfortunately those writers against Christianity have employed their time and labor, who have taken so much pains to prove, that among the first converts to that Religion, there

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We have here then, the utmost encouragement to tread in the steps of our divine Lawgiver, and to imitate, as far as we are able, that method of propagating his Religion which he adopted, and which was attended with such signal success. Although it is undoubtedly our duty "to preach the Gospel to every "creature*," to press it on all ranks of people, high and low, rich and poor; yet the example of our Lord plainly calls upon us to show a peculiar attention to those whom Providence has placed in the humble conditions of life. The reasons for this are obvious: they are the same which probably influenced our Saviour's conduct in this respect, and they still subsist in their full force. The poor have in general much fewer opportunities of learning their duty themselves than the wealthy and the great: their education seldom qualifies them, and their constant cares and labors leave them but little leisure, for acquiring sufficient religious knowledge without assistance. Their spiritual as well as temporal necessities are but too often overlooked, and disregarded by their superiors, and yet they form by far the largest and most necessary part of the community. Add to all this, that they are commonly much freer from prejudice, much less wedded to systems and opinions, more open to conviction, more anxious to obtain information, and more ready to embrace truth, than the higher ranks of men. These circumstances evidently point them out as objects highly worthy of our utmost care and diligence, in furnishing their minds with those sacred truths, those rules of moral and religious conduct, which are necessary to render them "wise unto salvation."

were but few in proportion of any considerable rank or fortune. This is a charge which the first preachers of the Gospel were so far from wishing to deny or dissemble, that they openly avowed and gloried in it†. Their successors have as little reason to be afraid, or ashamed of acknowledging the fact as they had. They justly consider it as one proof, among many others of that *divine wisdom* which superintended and conducted the progress of Christianity in a way so different from what *worldly wisdom* would have dictated; beginning with the cottage and ending with the imperial throne. False religion has generally reversed this order, and has succeeded accordingly.

† 1 *Cor. i.* 26. * Mark xvi. 15.

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With this view it was, that *The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge* was first instituted. It breathes the true spirit of Christianity, and follows, at a humble distance, the example of its divine Author, by diffusing the light of the Gospel more especially among the POOR. This is its peculiar province and employment; and there are two ways in which it carries this benevolent purpose into execution.

The first is, by encouraging the erection of charity-schools in every part of the kingdom, and by supplying them afterwards with proper religious instructions and wholsome rules for their direction and good government. The fruit of these its pious labors and exhortations in this city, and its neighborhood, you have now before your eyes. You here see near five thousand children collected together from the charity schools in and about London and Westminster. A spectacle this, which is not perhaps, to be paralleled in any other country in the world; which it is impossible for any man of the least sensibility to contemplate without emotions of tenderness and delight; which we may venture to say, that even our Lord himself (who always showed a remarkable affection for children) would have looked on with complacency; and which speaks more forcibly in favor of this branch of the Society's paternal care and attention, than any arguments for it that words could convey to you.* I shall therefore, only observe on this head, that large as the number is of the charity children now present in this place, it bears but a small proportion to the whole number in the schools of Great Britain and Ireland, which exceeds *forty thousand.* And when you consider that this Society was the original promoter, and has been the constant patron and protector of these schools, which have subsisted

* The Trustees of the charity-schools obtained permission this year, *for the first time*, to range the children (amounting to near five thousand) in a kind of temporary amphitheatre under the dome of St. Paul's where the service was performed, and the sermon preached, the congregation occupying the area. The effect of so large a number of children, disposed in that form, and uniting with one voice in the responses and in the psalm-singing, was wonderfully pleasing and affecting. This practice has since been continued annually.

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now for near a century; that the children educated in them are taken from the most indigent and helpless class of people; that, consequently, without these schools, they would probably have had no education at all; and that nothing is so likely to preserve them from idleness, beggary, profligacy and misery, as impressing early and strongly on their unoccupied and uncorrupted minds sound principles of piety, industry, honesty, and sobriety; you will be sensible that the Society has adopted a plan no less beneficial to the public, than comformable to the sentiments of the great Author of our Religion, in recommending charity-schools as one very effectual method of "preaching the Gospel to the "poor."

But the Society goes still further than this. It does not confine its cares merely to the *childhood* of the poor; it follows them, with unremitted kindness, through every subsequent period of their lives. It is the guard of their youth, the companion of their manhood, the comfort of their old age. The principal part of its employment is to provide, at a very considerable expense, and to disperse among the lower people of all ages and occupations, a very large number of Bibles, Common Prayer-books, and small tracts on a variety of religious subjects, composed purposely for their use by men of eminent piety and ability, adapted to their capacities, and accommodated to all their various spiritual wants. In these are explained to them, in the clearest and most familiar terms, the first grounds and rudiments of their faith, the main evidences and most essential doctrines of Christianity, the several duties they owe to God, their neighbor, and themselves, and the nature and benefits of the two Christian sacraments. By these, also, they are assisted in the service of the church, in their private devotions, in reading, understanding, and applying the Holy Scriptures; are supported under afflictions, are guarded against temptation, and fortified more especially against those vices to which the poor are most subject, and furnished with

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proper cautions and arguments, to preserve them from the artifices of popery, and the delusions of enthusiasm.

This is a short sketch of the several objects to which the governing members of our Society have directed their attention, and the provision they have made for the instruction of the ignorant and the poor. Of the little treatises here alluded to, some might undoubtedly be much improved, and some, perhaps, might be spared. But many of them are excellent, the greatest part extremely useful, and calculated to do essential service to that rank of men among whom they are distributed. Nor is the benevolence of our Society restrained within the limits of this island only. Its principal object is, indeed, as it certainly ought to be, the instruction of our own poor; but it has occasionally extended its kind assistance to other countries, both neighboring and remote. It has established schools and missions in various parts of the East Indies, for the conversion and instruction of the Heathens; and has dispersed among them many religious tracts in the Malabar language. It has carried its regard to the Greek church in Palestine, Syria, Mesopotamia, Arabia, and Egypt. For this purpose it has printed the New Testament and Psalter in Arabic, and has already sent a large number of both, with some other tracts, into Persia and India. It has published three several editions of the Bible in the Welsh language, and distributed them through every part of Wales, to the amount of fifty thousand copies. It has made provision for the education of youth, and the due celebration of divine worship, in the Scilly islands, where there was the utmost need of both; and it has likewise printed and dispersed over the Isle of Man many thousand copies of the Old and New Testament, of the Common Prayer, and other religious books, in the vulgar language of that island.

By this constant attention of the managers of the Society to the spiritual wants of the poor in many different parts of the world, as well as at home, the number of religious tracts and books which they have distributed, from their first institution to this day, is so im-

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mensely great, as almost to exceed belief*. And although, in some instances, the success of their endeavors has not fully answered their expectations, yet there can be no doubt but that upon the whole their labors have done infinite service to the cause of Religion. Indeed, all the clergy who are members of the Society, and have made a constant and discreet use of their tracts, can bear, and many of them *have* borne, ample testimony to the advantages resulting from them. Next to the stated offices of divine worship, and the regular instructions from the pulpit, it is evident, that nothing can contribute more to excite and keep alive a due sense of Religion in the minds of the common people, than supplying them constantly with a variety of well-composed and well-chosen religious treatises, each of them judiciously adapted to their respective necessities. It supplies, in some degree the want of that most useful branch of ministerial duty which has, I fear, of late years, grown but too much into disuse, *personal conference with our parishioners;* for which, unless we have some such substitute as this, we shall find, probably, that our public instructions will produce much less effect than they naturally ought.

There is another argument for the distribution of small religious tracts among the common people, which has, I think, considerable weight. It appears, that this is the very mode made use of by the adversaries of our Religion, in order to undermine and destroy it. They consider small tracts of infidelity, as the best and most effectual method of disseminating irreligion among their readers and admirers; and accordingly, have employed all their talents in composing, and all their industry in dispersing them over the world†.

* Even within the last fifty years, the number of books and tracts distributed by them has amounted to no less than 2,834,371.

† It is certain, that M. Voltaire, in particular, has written innumerable little pieces against Revelation; that he prided himself greatly in having found out this method of *enlightening the world:* and that he was highly applauded by Mr. D'Alembert and others for the wisdom and prudence of his conduct in this respect.

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Let us then endeavor to foil our enemies at their own weapons, which will surely prove more powerful, and more successful, in the hands of truth, than in those of error; and let us with that view, give all possible encouragement to a Society, which is instituted for the very purpose of furnishing us with a constant supply of the best helps towards counteracting the pernicious designs of those who "set themselves against "us;" who make use of every artifice to deprive us of all Religion, or to introduce a corrupt one.

Inconsiderable and trivial as the little treatises dispersed by the Society may seem, yet it is by the repeated efforts of such small instruments as these, that the greatest effects are often produced. Their numbers, their plainness, and their cheapness, will give them a force and efficacy, and extent of circulation, which much more voluminous and more labored compositions may not be able to acquire; just as we see that the lowest and humblest, and most numerous bodies of men, not the opulent and splendid few, are those that constitute the real strength and wealth of the community.

It has been frequently asserted, that it is philosophy, modern philosophy, which has enlightened and improved mankind. But whom has it enlightened and improved? A small knot, perhaps, of wits and philosophers, and learned men; but how have *the multitude*, the bulk of the people, those who really constitute the world, been enlightened and improved? Do *they* read the works of Bolingbroke, of D'Alembert, of Hume, or of Raynal? Thanks be to God those elaborate and bulky compositions are equally beyond their understandings to comprehend, their leisure to peruse, and their ability to purchase. And even the smaller pieces above-mentioned of Voltaire and others, are not calculated for the *lowest classes* of mankind, but for men of some education and some talents. And their object is not to inform, but to perplex and mislead; not to convince by argument, but to entertain with strokes of wit and buffoonery. Most fortunately for mankind,

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the mischief of such writings is confined (comparatively speaking) to a very narrow circle, which their admirers, however, are pleased to dignify with the name of *the world*. The vulgar, the vile populace, so far are those great philosophers from desiring to instruct and reform, that they think them *utterly unworthy of a reasonable religion*. This the most eminent of their fraternity has declared in express terms*. On the other hand, the Author of *our Religion* declares, that he came "to preach the Gospel to the poor."—Here, then, you see opposed to each other the spirit of CHRISTIANITY and the spirit of PHILOSOPHY. Judge ye for yourselves, which is most worthy of God and beneficial to man, and make your choice accordingly. If you take PHILOSOPHY for your guide, you will despise the humble employment of diffusing religious knowledge among the common people; but if you chuse CHRIST for your master, you will give a proof of it this day, by patronizing a Society that forms itself on *his* model, and professes to carry on the great work of reformation which *He* begun, in the very way which he pointed out, "by preaching the Gospel to the poor."

* M. Voltaire, speaking of certain superstitious sects in China, has these very remarkable words: "Ces sectes sont tolerees a la Chine *pour l' usage* "*du Vulgaire*, comme des alimens grossiers faits pour le nourrir; tandis "que les magistrats and les lettres, separes en tout du peuple, se nourissent "d'une substance plus pure. *Il semble en effect que la populace ne merite pas* "*une religion raisonnable*." Essai sur l'Histoire Generale, tom. i. p. 33, 34.

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SERMON XXXI.

1 Cor. ix. 25.

Every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things: now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible.

THE design of this passage is plainly to recommend the great Christian duty of being "temperate in all things;" that is, of obtaining an entire command over our passions; or, as it is expressed a few verses after, of "keeping under our bodies, and bringing "them into subjection." This self-government is indispensably necessary, both to the real enjoyment of the present life, and to the possession of everlasting happiness in the next. But then, like every thing else that is valuable, it is as difficult to acquire, as it is useful and excellent; and it stands in need of the most powerful arguments to recommend and enforce it. One of the strongest is here urged by St. Paul. To raise the courage and invigorate the resolution of the Corinthians, to whom the Epistle is addressed, and of all others engaged in the same state of warfare with their corrupt inclinations, he reminds them of the immortal prize they are contending for,-that crown of glory which is to recompence their virtuous conflict. And to give this still greater weight, he compares their rewards with those proposed to the competitors in the well-known games or sports which were celebrated near Corinth. In these, all that was contended for, was nothing more than "a corruptible crown," a wreath composed of

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perishable leaves: whereas, the prize of the Christian is an incorruptible one, a crown of glory that fadeth not away, an eternity of real and substantial happiness in Heaven. And yet, poor and contemptible as the reward was in those games, they who strove for the mastery in them, were temperate in all things, were content to exercise the strictest discipline and abstemiousness, to abridge themselves both in the quantity and the quality of their diet, to renounce every pleasure and every indulgence that tended to weaken the body, and voluntarily to undergo many hardships in order to prepare themselves for the contest, and "to run so that "they might obtain." How is it possible, then, after this, for the Christian to complain of the difficulties he has to encounter in this his state of probation, and when celestial rewards are held up to his view, to shrink from the severities through which he must arrive at them? If he has any honest ambition in his nature, will he not emulate the ardor and activity of these Grecian combatants? Will he not cheerfully go through a similar course of preparatory discipline? Will he not impose upon himself a little moderation in his pleasures, a little self-government and self-denial? Will he not contentedly give up a few trivial indulgences, and transient gratifications, in order to secure a prize infinitely more glorious than theirs; a crown incorruptible, felicity eternal, commensurate to the existence, and suited to the capacity of an immortal soul?

To this irresistible strength of argument St. Paul subjoins, as an additional motive, his own example. "I therefore," says he, "so run, not as uncertainly," not heedlessly and ignorantly, but with a perfect knowledge of the course I am to pursue, the rules I am to observe, the prize I am to aim at, and the conditions on which it is to be attained. I do not act at random, but upon sure grounds. My views are steadily fixed on the grand point, and I press forwards in the way marked out with unwearied vigor and perseverance. "So fight I, not as one that beateth the air." In this Christian combat I do not mis-spend my activity, and

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exert my powers to no purpose; I do not fight with my own shadow, or with an imaginary antagonist*, wasting my strength on the empty air; but I strive for the mastery in good earnest; I consider myself as having real enemies to combat, the world, the flesh, and the devil; I know that my life, my salvation, my all, is at stake; and therefore, in imitation of the competitors in the Isthmian game, I exercise a strict government over myself; I subdue my rebellious passions, by continual acts of self-denial; "I keep under my bo-"dy, and bring it into subjection," lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

Such is the reasoning of this eloquent apostle at large; and it behoves us all to pay due attention to it; for, though in one circumstance we do not all resemble him, are not all appointed to preach to others; yet are we all, like him, engaged in the Christian conflict with passion and temptation; and must, like him, either come off victorious in it, and gain the prize, or be shamefully subdued, and lose our own souls.

Ever since the unhappy fall of our first parents, and the confusion introduced by it into our moral frame, the passions have acquired so much strength and boldness, that they aspire to nothing less than an absolute sovereignty over the soul; and we are reduced to the necessity of either governing them, or being governed by them. This is literally the choice proposed to us at our first entrance into life; and it concerns us to weigh and consider it well; for we can never decide on a question of more importance. It is this chiefly that must determine us to virtue and happiness, or to vice and misery. For nothing can be more clear, than that far the greater part of the evils we suffer ourselves, and of those we bring upon others, arise from the dominion of our passions. "From whence come wars and fightings among you? "Come they not hence, even of your lusts, which "war in your members?" From whence come murders, robberies, oppression, and fraud? Whence come

* See the commentators.

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breaches of friendship and hospitality, violations of the marriage-bed, ruin, infamy, and remorse to unguarded innocence, confusion and distress to whole families, the destruction of our own health and repose, the dissipation of our fortunes, and the consequent wretchedness of all that look up to us for support? Do not all these, and an infinite number of other calamities, spring solely from the brutal violence of headstrong and unruly desires, bursting forth like a torrent upon mankind, throwing down every obstacle, and breaking through every the most sacred fence that opposes itself to their impetuous course?

Such are the mischiefs which daily follow from suffering them to gain the ascendancy; and such we have to expect from it ourselves. There is, in fact, no drudgery upon earth like that of serving the passions. Of all tyrants in the world, they are the most unrelenting and insupportable. They will utterly debase and unman the soul; debilitate and obscure its noblest powers; force their natural sovereign reason to submit to the meanest offices, and most scandalous artifices, for their gratification; compel us to resign up our truest interests, our most solid comforts, our most valuable expectations; nay, even to invent principles to justify their extravagancies, to reject the revelation that condemns them, to strip ourselves of all claim to immortality, to doubt every thing, to dispute every thing except their commands.

To avoid these dreadful mischiefs, which are by no means exaggerated, there is no other way left, but to resolve with St. Paul, on "keeping under our body, "and bringing it into subjection." But this, too, though attended at the last with the happiest consequences, is not, however, without its difficulties. These, indeed, to all are not the same; there is, undoubtedly, a difference in the constitution of our minds, as well as of our bodies; and some men are blest with such singularly happy dispositions, such sober desires, such tractable and obedient inclinations, that, with a common degree of prudence and circumspection, and

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Christian discipline, they preserve the utmost tranquillity and order in the soul, go on uniformly, and almost without interruption, in the discharge of their duty, and find the ways of Religion "to be ways of pleasant-"ness, and all her paths to be peace." Blest, indeed, beyond measure, are such persons as these, infinitely better provided for the journey of life, and infinitely better furnished with the proper materials of happiness than those who are generally much more envied, but with much less reason; those who are favored with riches, genius, rank, or power. These are contemptible things compared to the inconceivable comfort of a well-ordered mind, and well-governed affections, which, in a work of infinite importance that must be done, leave us nothing but what it is extremely easy to do. But with the generality of mankind, this is far from being the case. Almost every one finds within himself some one unruly passion at least, which is continually disturbing his repose, and endangering his innocence; and which, without the utmost vigilance and resolution, he finds it impossible to subdue. Even he who "delights in the law of God after the inward man, "frequently sees another law in the outward man, war-"ring against the law of his mind, and bringing it in-"to captivity to the law of sin." Unable to rescue himself from this wretched slavery, and equally unable to support the consequences of submitting to it, no wonder if such an one, in the utmost agony of mind, cries out with St. Paul in his assumed character, "Wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me "from the body of this death?" Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord; there is one that can, and will deliver you, even the Redeemer that died for you. He it is who will do what no other moral guide can do for you; will both enable you, by additional supplies of strength, to overcome those lusts which war against your soul, and will also crown that victory by a reward more than adequate to the pain of the conflict. If Christianity requires from its votaries a higher degree of sanctity and purity, and a stricter com-

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mand over the passions than any other Religion, it has a right to do so; because it affords proportionably greater helps towards accomplishing that great work, and a proportionably greater prize to recompence the labor of it. For however severe this struggle with our appetites may be to us, and severe enough, God knows, it sometimes, is, yet it is our comfort, that if we endure to the end, "those light afflictions which "are but for a moment, shall work for us a far more "exceeding and eternal weight of glory." This single consideration is enough to make us "more than con-"querors through Christ that strengtheneth us." For who that has in view immortal joys and incorruptible crowns, can repine at the conflict he must go through to obtain them? Who, that professes himself in earnest a disciple of Christ, can murmur at the hardship of mortifying his passions, when even they who strive for the mastery in the most trivial contests, and for the silliest rewards, are temperate in all things? The instance produced in the text to prove this, was full to the purpose, was peculiarly calculated to strike the Corinthians, being a familiar, and, as it were, domestic fact, within the compass of their own observation. Its force is very little, if at all, abated, when applied to ourselves; but if we have a mind for similar instances nearer home, they are to be found in abundance. We may see numbers of our fellow-creatures, on every side of us, undergoing the greatest labors and inconveniences in pursuit of the most trivial and worthless objects. We see the vicious man frequently taking more pains, and struggling through greater distresses, in order to gratify his passions, than it would cost him to subdue them. We see the avaricious man tormenting himself with continual care and anxiety, submitting to the meanest and most sordid artifices to acquire wealth and to retain it; practising severer mortifications than the utmost rigor of monastic discipline would exact, denying himself not only the most innocent gratifications, but the common necessaries of life; and sometimes even perishing for want in the midst of abundance.

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And what is the great object of all this voluntary self-denial? It is to amass a hoard of wealth which he has not the spirit to use in this world, nor the power of carrying with him into the next.

We see others who cannot justly be charged with avarice; yet stimulated by the ambition of raising themselves and their families to opulence and distinction, and with that view sacrificing their youth, their ease, their health, their comfort, the best and happiest part of their days, to the labor of some most painful employment, which at last, perhaps, rewards them with a fortune, when disease, or old age, or death, render them incapable of enjoying it.

We see the man of adventure and of enterprize penetrating the most remote and inhospitable regions of the earth, exposing himself to unwholesome climates and untried oceans, encountering the dangers of rocks and tempests, of famine and disease, of treachery and violence from unrelenting savages; and all this in the pursuit of knowledge or of emolument, which seldom answer his expectations, or of a visionary fame, which perhaps commences not, till he is gone "to that land "where all things are forgotten."

These are instances of self-denial which we have every day before our eyes; and shall we, then, be deterred from the pursuit of our eternal interests, and of immortal glory, by the restraints and the difficulties attending our Christian warfare, when we see men voluntarily and cheerfully encountering far greater hardships, and far severer trials for the sake of acquiring what appears to them most valuable in this life, but which they find in the end to be delusive and unsatisfactory?

It is, in short, a vain and a foolish attempt to think of separating, in any instance, great labor and difficulty from great attainments. And the more valuable the acquisition, the more severe are the hardships that obstruct the way to it. The lowest mechanic arts can never be carried to any degree of perfection without much toil; works of imagination, intellectual accom-

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plishments, require still more; virtue and religion, as being the greatest ornaments of our nature, most of all. But then the reward is in proportion to the labor; and to renounce the one through a cowardly fear of the other, is one of the meanest thoughts that can enter the human mind.

It is hard sometimes, it is confessedly hard, to deny a craving appetite, and to subdue a vicious habit; but is it not still harder to lose everlasting happiness for a momentary indulgence; and, like the wretched Esau, to sell Heaven in reversion for a mess of pottage?

Let us eat and drink, says the voluptuary; let us indulge without delay, and without reserve, every appetite of our nature, for "to-morrow we die," to-morrow we may cease to exist, and all possibility of any further enjoyment will be for ever gone. Let us, then, take our full measure of it while we can. "Let us "enjoy the good things that are present. Let us fill "ourselves with costly wines and ointments; and "let no flower of the spring pass by us. Let us "crown ourselves with rose-buds before they be "withered. Let none of us go without his part of "our voluptuousness. Let us leave tokens of our "joyfulness in every place; for this is our portion, "and our lot is this*." This language cannot be wondered at, from the man who rejects all idea of a future existence. But it would be folly and madness in him, who believes the Christian doctrine of a resurrection, and a retribution in another world. To him the conclusion, from the very same premises, must be a directly opposite one. It must be plainly this; Let us keep our hearts with all diligence, and restrain our passions within the bounds of duty, for to-morrow we may die; to-morrow we may be called to give an account of our moral conduct to the great Sovereign of the Universe, who has peremptorily commanded us to be temperate in all things. Let this consideration, then, be deeply fixed in our hearts, and be constantly present to our thoughts, and it will, in the hour of trial, add

* Wisdom ii. 6. 10.

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strength to our resolutions, and fortitude to our souls. It is not, it must be confessed, a very easy task to keep that strict and steady command over ourselves which Christianity requires. But we must not be much surprized, if the rewards of Heaven are not to be had for nothing. Immortal glory, and everlasting felicity, are not such very trivial things, as to be obtained without any exertions on our part. Some price must surely be paid for such an acquisition, something *must* be given up in present for an inheritance of such infinite value in future. "There is but one paradise "for men," said Mahomet, (turning away his eyes from the tempting prospect of Damascus) "there is "but one paradise for men, and, for my part, I will "not take mine in this world*." If this sensual impostor could, in this instance at least, sacrifice present gratification even to *his* false notions of future happiness, well may we be content to endure a little temporary self-denial for the sake of a recompence hereafter, perfect in its nature, and endless in its duration. It is true, indeed, that taking all things into the account, the yoke of our divine Master is easy, and his burthen is light. Yet still there *is* a yoke, there *is* a burthen to bear. We are to take up our cross, and on that cross we are to crucify our affections and lusts. In the successive stages of our existence here, successive adversaries rise up to oppose our progress to Heaven, and bring us into captivity to sin and misery. Pleasure, interest, business, power, honor, fame, all the follies and all the corruptions of this world, each in their turn, assail our feeble nature, and through these we must manfully fight our way to the great end we have in view. But the difficulty and the pain of this contest will be infinitely lessened, by a resolute and vigorous exertion of our powers, and our resources at our first setting out in life. If we strenuously resist those enemies of our salvation that present themselves to us in our earliest youth, all the rest that follow in our mature age will be an easy conquest. On him, who in the beginning of life has kept

* Maundrell, p. 121.

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himself unspotted from the world, all its subsequent attractions and allurements, all its magnificence, wealth, and splendor, will make little or no impression. A mind that has been long habituated to discipline, restraint, and self-command, amidst far more powerful temptations, will have nothing to apprehend from such assailants as these. But our great and principal security is assistance from above, which will never be denied to those who fervently apply for it. And with the omnipotence of divine grace to support us, and an eternity of happiness to reward us, what is there that can shake our constancy, or corrupt our fidelity?

Set yourselves, then, without delay, to acquire an early habit of strict self-government, and an early intercourse with your Almighty Protector. Let it be your first care to establish the sovereignty of reason, and the empire of grace, over your souls, and it will soon be no pain to you; but, on the contrary, a real pleasure "to be temperate in all things." Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit yourselves like men, be strong, be resolute, be patient. Look frequently up to the prize that is set before you, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Consider, that every pang you feel on account of your duty here, will be placed to your credit, and increase your happiness, hereafter. The conflict with your passions will grow less irksome every day, a few years will put an entire end to it, and you will then, to your unspeakable comfort, be enabled to cry out with St. Paul, "I have fought a good fight, "I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of right-"eousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall "give me at that day."

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SERMON XXXII.

MATTHEW xxvii. 54.

Truly this was the Son of God.

WE have here a testimony of the divine character of our blessed Lord, which must be considered as in the highest degree impartial and incorrupt. It is the testimony not of friends, but of enemies; not of those who were prepossessed in favor of Christ and his Religion, but of those who, by habit and education, were prejudiced, and strongly prejudiced against them. It is, in short, the voice of nature and of truth; the honest unpremeditated confession of the heathen centurion, and the soldiers under him, whom the Roman governor had appointed as a guard over the crucifixion of our Lord. So forcibly struck were these persons with the behavior of Jesus, and the astonishing circumstances attending his death, that they broke out involuntarily into the exclamation of the text, "Truly "this was the Son of God."

Different opinions, it is well known, have been entertained by learned men concerning the precise sense in which the centurion understood Christ to be *the Son of God*. But without entering here into any critical niceties (which do not in the least affect the main object of this discourse) I shall only observe in general, that even after making every abatement which either grammatical accuracy, or parallel passages, may seem to require, the very lowest meaning we can affix to the

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text, in any degree consistent with the natural force of the language, and the magnitude of the occasion is this: that the centurion, comparing together every thing he had seen, and rising in his expressions of admiration, as our Lord's encreasing magnanimity grew more and more upon his observation, concluded him to be not only a person of most extraordinary virtue, and most transcendent righteousness, but of a nature *more than human*, and bearing evident marks of a *divine original*.

That his conclusion went at least so far as this, will appear highly probable from considering the two distinct grounds on which it was founded.

The first was, the attention with which the centurion appears to have marked the whole behavior of our Lord during the dreadful scene he passed through, from the beginning to the end of his sufferings upon the cross. He placed himself, as St. Mark informs us, *over against* Jesus. From that station he kept his eye constantly fixed upon him, and observed, with anxious care, every thing he said or did. And when he saw the meekness, the patience, the resignation, the firmness, with which our Lord endured the most excruciating torments; when he heard him at one time praying fervently for his murderers; at another disposing, with dignity and authority, of a place in paradise, to one of his fellow-sufferers; and, at length, with that confidence which nothing but conscious virtue, and conscious divinity, could, at such a time, inspire, recommending his spirit into the hands of his *heavenly Father*; from these circumstances, what other inference could the centurion draw than that Jesus was not merely a *righteous* but a *heavenly-born* person?

But there was another, and that a still more powerful proof of our Lord's celestial origin, which offered itself to the centurion's notice; I mean the astonishing events that took place when Jesus expired; the agitation into which all nature seemed to be thrown, the darkness, the earthquake, the rending of rocks, the opening of graves, miracles which the centurion con-

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ceived, and justly conceived, were not likely to be wrought on the death of a *mere mortal**.

And, indeed, it must be acknowledged, that the miracles recorded, and the prophecies accomplished, in the history of Christ, are the two great pillars on which our faith in him must principally rest. But as an enquiry into this sort of proof, would lead us into an argument much too extensive and too complex for our present purpose, I shall content myself with enlarging a little on that other kind of evidence abovementioned, the character and conduct of our divine Master. Of this the centurion saw nothing more perhaps than the closing scene. And if this operated so forcibly, as it seems to have done, on *his* mind, how powerfully must *ours* be affected, by taking into the account the virtues which Jesus displayed through life, as well as those he manifested at his death? We may reasonably expect, that it will at once confirm the faith of those who believe, and produce conviction in those who do not. .....

Were we only to say of our Saviour, what even Pilate said of him, *that we can find no fault in him*, that the whole temper of his soul, and the whole tenor of his life, were absolutely blameless throughout; that from the first moment of his birth, to his last agony on the cross, he never once fell into the smallest error of conduct, never once spake unadvisedly with his lips; were we, I say, to confine ourselves solely to this *negative* kind of excellence, it is more than can be said of any other person that ever yet came into the world. But great and uncommon as even this sort of perfection is, it forms but a very small part of that which belonged to Jesus. He was not only exempt from every the slightest failing, but he possessed and practised every imaginable virtue that was consistent with his situation; and *that*, too, in the highest degree of excellence to which virtue is capable of being exalted. That idea of complete goodness which the ancient philosophers took so much fruitless pains to describe, and

* See Dr. Doddridge's note from Elsner in his exposition of this passage.

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which they justly thought would so strongly attract the affections of men if it could be made visible, was in the person of the Holy Jesus, and *in him only*, since the world began, presented to the eyes of mankind. His ardent love for God, his zeal for the service, his resignation to the will, his unreserved obedience to the commands of his heavenly Father; the compassion, the kindness, the solicitude, the tenderness, he showed for the whole human race, even for the worst of sinners and the bitterest of his enemies; the perfect command he had over his own passions; the consummate prudence with which he eluded all the snares that were laid for him; the wisdom, the justness, the delicacy of his replies; the purity and the gentleness of his manners: the sweetness yet dignity of his deportment; the mildness with which he reproved the mistakes, the prejudices, and the failings of his disciples; the temper he preserved under the severest provocations from his enemies; the patience, the composure, the meekness, with which he endured the cruellest insults, and the grossest indignities; the fortitude he displayed under the most painful and ignominious death that human ingenuity could devise, or human malignity inflict; and that divinely charitable prayer which he put up for his murderers in the very midst of his agony: "Father, "forgive them, for they know not what they do:" all these, and a multitude of other peculiar excellencies in his character, (which it is impossible here to enumerate,) concur to render him, beyond comparison, the greatest, the wisest, and the best, of men.

Considered more particularly as a PUBLIC TEACHER, what an understanding must that have been, and whence enlightened, from which so sublime and perfect a system of piety and morals, as that of the Gospel, proceeded, excelling not only all the discoveries of men, and the most perfect systems of Pagan morality, but all the revelations of God made before him*.

* For the principal and most valuable part of the six following pages, I am indebted to my late excellent friend and patron Archbishop Secker.

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But further still. How astonishing, and from what source inspired, must the mind of that man be, who could entertain so vast a thought in so low a condition, as that of instructing and reforming *a whole world*; a world divided between atheism and superstition, but universally abandoned to sin; of teaching the whole race of mankind to live soberly, righteously, and godly here, and leading them on to an eternity of happiness hereafter? How contemptible a figure do they, who affected to be the conquerors of the world, make, when compared with him who undertook to be the saviour of it? Then, in the execution of this immense design, what condescension without meanness, what majesty without pride, what firmness without obstinacy, what zeal without bitterness or enthusiasm, what piety without superstition; how wonderful a combination of seemingly most opposite, if any *could be* opposite, virtues; how exact a temperature of every thing great, and venerable, and lovely, in his soul! And another very important and remarkable consideration is, that all these admirable qualities appeared perfectly easy and natural to him, and seemed not to require the least exertion of his mind to produce or to support them. And the case was the same in his discourses and his instructions. No emotion when he delivered the most sublime and affecting doctrines, the most comfortable or most terrifying predictions. The prophets before him fainted and sunk under the communications which they received from above. But truths that overwhelmed the *servants* of God, were familiar to his *Son*. Composed on the grestest occasions, respectable even on the least, he was at all times the same; and the uniform dignity and propriety of his behavior throughout, evidently flowed from the inbred grandeur and rectitude of his mind. Tried he was every way (and that in so public a life perpetually) by wicked men, by the wicked one, by friends as well as by enemies; but far from being overcome, never once disconcerted, never once embarrassed, but calmly superior to every artifice, to every temptation, to every difficulty.

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Well, then, may we ask, even after this very short and very imperfect sketch of our Saviour's character, "whence has this man these things, and what wisdom "is this, that is given unto him?" He had evidently none of the usual means or opportunities of cultivating his understanding, or improving his heart. He was born in a low and indigent condition, without education, without learning, without any models to form himself upon, either in his own time, and his own country, or in any records of former ages, that were at all likely to fall into his hands. Yet notwithstanding this, he manifested and supported invariably through life such wisdom and such virtue as were never before found united, and, we may venture to say, never will be again united in any human being. The consequence, then, is unavoidable, and one of these two things *must* be true. Either the character of our Lord, as drawn in the Gospels, must be absolutely ideal and fictitious, existing no where but in the imagination of those who drew it; or else the person to whom it really belonged must be endowed with powers more than human. For never did mere mortal man either speak or act as Jesus did.

If we take the former part of the alternative, and affirm, that the portrait of our Saviour, as drawn in the Gospels, is an ideal one; where, in the first place, shall we find the man that could draw it? where shall we find the man, who, by the mere force of imagination, could invent a character at once so absolutely perfect, and so truly original? The circumstances of his uniting the divine and human nature in one person, and of his being at one and the same time the Messiah of the Jews, and the Instructor, the Redeemer, the Mediator, and the Judge of Mankind, are so very peculiar, and so perfectly new; and yet all these several parts are so well supported, and preserved so distinct, and every thing our Saviour said or did is so admirably accommodated to each, that to form such a character as this, without any original to copy it from, exceeds the utmost stretch of human invention. Even

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the best of the Greek and Roman writers never produced any thing to be compared with it, either in point of originality or of excellence, though they frequently exerted themselves to the utmost in forming beautiful portraits of wisdom, greatness, and goodness of mind, sometimes in the way of compliment, sometimes of instruction. But however some extraordinary genius, in the polite and learned nations of the world, might have succeeded in such an attempt, let it be remembered that the historians of Jesus were JEWS, natives of a remote, and, in general, unlettered corner of the world. How came *they* by such extraordinary powers of invention? They have never shown such powers in any other instance. Not even the sublimest of their own sacred books equal, in this respect, the history of the Gospel; much less their apocryphal writings, much less Philo and Josephus, though instructed in Pagan literature and philosophy. And as to the succeeding rabbies, they have not given the history of a single person that is not over-run with wildness and absurdity. Or if we think it possible, that *one* Jew, at least, might be found, who, with the help of extraordinary talents, and a better education than any of the rest ever had, might do so much more than any of the rest ever did, what color can there be for applying this to the EVANGELISTS, to those who have been so often and so opprobriously, called the publicans, the tent-makers, and the fishermen of Galilee? *They* had never studied at Athens or at Rome. *They* had no superior talents, no learning, no education, no skill in designing or coloring ideal characters. It is not most assuredly, it is not men such as these that *invent*.

Nay, further still, had they been ever so capable of forming such a character as that of our Saviour, what reason in the world is there to imagine, that they would have ascribed it to their *Messiah*. They expected *him* to be of a spirit and a behavior widely different from that of the meek, and humble, and passive Jesus. They expected an enterprizing and prosperous warrior, avenging the injurious sufferings of his countrymen,

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trampling the nations under his feet, and establishing the Jewish empire, and with it the Jewish law, throughout the world. Possessed as they were with these notions, instead of drawing for their promised Deliverer such a portrait as the Gospel presents to us, had they seen it ready drawn, and been asked whose it was, *he* would have been the last person upon earth for whom they would have conceived it intended.

Besides, what conceivable inducement could the sacred historians have to impose an imaginary personage upon the world; and why, above all, should they persevere in this imposition, when they saw and felt that hatred, and persecutions and death, were the certain consequences of their maintaining the reality of a character, which they knew all the while to be a mere phantom of their own creation, and could have saved themselves by confessing it? But even if it were possible that human creatures might, contrary to all honesty, and all interest, be thus unaccountably bent on deceiving, we have as full evidence as can be, that the Evangelists were *not* so. There is manifestly an air of simplicity and godly sincerity, of plain, unornamented truth in every thing they relate; nothing wrought up with art, nothing studiously placed in the fairest light to attract the eye, no solicitude to dwell even on the most illustrious parts of our Saviour's character; but on the contrary, so dry and cold a manner of telling the most striking facts, and most affecting truths, as furnishes ground to apprehend that they themselves did not always distinctly perceive the divine wisdom and excellence of many things said and done by Jesus, and recorded in their books. At least, they have by no means brought them forward into view as they well deserved, and as men who wrote *with a design* would most certainly have done. This very circumstance, added to the whole turn and tenor of their writings, most clearly proves, that they followed with religious care, and delivered with scrupulous fidelity, *truth* and *fact*, as it appeared to them, and nothing else.

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It is evident, therefore, upon the whole, that our blessed Lord was, in reality, the very person that he is represented to be in the Gospel. And as he is represented to have possessed a degree of perfection, both intellectual and moral, far beyond what human nature is capable of arriving at, and that, too, without any of the common means of acquiring such perfection, the conclusion can be no other than this, *that both he and his religion came from God.*

But it may still, perhaps, be said, that there is no necessity for supposing any thing *supernatural* in the case. He was only one of those wonderful and extraordinary characters that sometimes appear even in the very lowest stations; and by the force of great natural talents, and a native dignity of mind, and a constitutional goodness of disposition, break out from the obscurity of their situation, and rise superior to all the rest of mankind.

But besides what has been already insisted on, that no such character as that of Christ is to be found in any nation of the world, in any period of time, or any situation of life, it must be remembered, that our Lord *himself* laid claim to something *more* than the character of a great and a good man. He laid claim to a *divine original.* He affirmed, that he was the Son of God, and that He and his Father were One. If therefore, this was not the case, he must have been either an enthusiast or an impostor. In other words, he must have been a very weak, or a very wicked man. But either of these suppositions is utterly irreconcilable with the description that has just been given of him, with every idea of wisdom and of goodness, which yet he has been proved, and is allowed to have possessed, in their utmost extent. Whoever, then, acknowledges him to be a great, a wise, and a perfectly good man, *must* also, *on his own principles* allow him that DIVINITY which he claimed.

Here, then, is a proof of the divine authority of our Lawgiver, and our religion, which every one may comprehend, and which it will not be easy for any one to

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withstand. Some alledge that they want leisure, and others that they want learning or ability, to investigate with sufficient care and accuracy, the prophetic, the miraculous, and the historical evidences of our faith*. This indeed, is commonly nothing more than mere pretence. But even this pretence is taken away by the argument here offered to their consideration. It is involved in no difficulty, and requires no laborious or critical examination, no uncommon degree of sagacity or ability to decide upon. Nothing more is requisite than to lay open the Bible, and to contemplate the character of our Lord, as it is there drawn with the most perfect fairness and honesty by the evangelists. Whoever can judge of any thing, can judge of this; and we know by experience, that it is calculated to carry conviction even into the most *unwilling* minds. We have seen, that even a Pagan centurion, when he beheld Jesus expiring on the cross, could not forbear crying out (and many others with him) "Truly this was the son of God." And it is very remarkable, that the contemplation of the very same scene, as described in the Gospel history, extorted a similar, but still stronger confession of Christ's divine nature, from one of the most eloquent of modern sceptics†, who has never been accused of too much credulity, and who, though he could bring himself to resist the force even of miracles and of prophecies, yet was overwhelmed with the evidence arising from the *character, the conduct, and the sufferings of Christ.* "Where," says he, "is the man, where is the philosopher, who can act, suffer, and die, without weakness, and without ostentation? When Plato describes his imaginary just man, covered with all the opprobrium of guilt, yet at the same time meriting the sublimest rewards of virtue, he paints precisely every feature in the character of Jesus Christ. The resemblance is so striking, that all the fathers have observed it, and it is

* The proofs of Christianity depend on the laborious investigation of historic evidence, and speculative theology. *History of the decline of the Roman Empire, vol. 3. p. 366.*

† Rosseau.

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impossible to be deceived in it. What prejudice, what blindness, must possess the mind of that man who *dares* to compare the son of Sophroniscus to the Son of Mary! What a distance is there between the one and the other! The death of Socrates, philosophizing calmly with his friends, is the most gentle that can be wished; that, of Jesus expiring in torments, insulted, derided, and reviled by all the people, the most horrible that can be imagined. Socrates taking the poisoned cup, blesses the man who presents it to him; and who, in the very act of presenting it, melts into tears. Jesus, in the midst of the most agonizing tortures, prays for his enraged executioners. Yes, if the life and death of Socrates are those of a sage, the life and death of Jesus are those of a God*."

It is not, then, the *prejudice* (as it has been called) of a Christian education, it is not the mere dotage of superstition, or the mere enthusiasm of pious affection and gratitude towards our Redeemer, which makes us discover in his character plain and evident marks of the SON of GOD. They have been discovered and acknowledged by men who were troubled with no such religious infirmities; by one man who was a professed Pagan, and by another man who, without professing it, and perhaps without knowing it, was in fact little better than a Pagan. On the strength of these testimonies, then, added to the proofs which have been here adduced, we may safely assume it as a principle, *that Jesus is the Son of God.* The necessary consequence is, that every thing he taught comes to us with the weight and sanction of DIVINE AUTHORITY, and demands from every sincere disciple of Christ implicit belief, and implicit obedience. We must not, after this, pretend (as is now too much the prevailing mode) to select just what we happen to like in the Gospel, and lay aside all the rest; to admit, for instance, the moral and preceptive part, and reject all those sublime doctrines which are peculiar to the Gospel, and which form the wall of partition between Christianity, and what is called natu-

* Emile, v. 2. p. 167.

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ral religion. This is assuming a liberty, and creating a distinction, which no believer in the divine authority of our Lord, can on any ground justify. Christ delivered all his doctrines in the name of God. He required that all of them, without exception, should be received. He has given no man a licence to adopt just as much, or as little of them, as he thinks fit. He has authorized no one human being to add thereto, or diminish therefrom.

Let us, then, never presume thus to new model the Gospel, according to our own particular humor or caprice, but be content to take it as God has thought fit to leave it. Let us admit, as it is our bounden duty, on the sole ground of his authority, those mysterious truths which are far beyond the reach of any finite understanding, but which it was *natural* and *reasonable* to expect, in a revelation pertaining to that incomprehensible Being, "the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity*." "Let us not exercise ourselves in "great matters, which are too high for us, but refrain "our souls and keep them low†." Laying aside all the superfluity and all the pride of human wisdom, "let "us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering," without refining, without philosophizing. Let us put ourselves, without delay and without reserve, into the hands of our heavenly Guide, and submit our judgments, with boundless confidence to his direction, who is "the way, the truth, and the life‡." Since we *know* in whom we believe; since it has been this day proved by one kind of argument, and might be proved by a thousand others, that he is the SON OF GOD; let us never forget that this gives him a right, a divine right, to the obedience of our *understandings*, as well as to the obedience of our *wills*. Let us, therefore, resolutely beat down every bold imagination, "every "high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge "of God; bringing into captivity every thought to the "obedience of Christ, and receiving with meekness the "ingrafted word, that is able to save our souls§."

* Isaiah lvii. 15. † Ps. cxxxi. 1. ‡ John xiv. 6. § James i. 21.

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SERMON XXXIII*.

Psalm xxvii. 16.

O tarry thou the Lord's leisure; be strong, and he shall comfort thine heart; and put thou thy trust in the Lord.

THAT this life is not, and was not intended to be, a state of perfect happiness, or even of constant ease and tranquillity, is a truth which no one will be disposed to controvert. That we are beset with dangers, and exposed to calamities of various kinds, which we can neither foresee nor avert, is equally certain. It is a fact, which, probably, most of those who now hear me know too well, from their own experience; and the rest will most assuredly know it, full time enough: for there cannot be a weaker or more childish imagination, than to flatter ourselves with the hope of passing through the world without our share of those calamities, which are inseparable from mortality. Affliction, then, of one kind or other, being unavoidable, it is evidently a matter of the very last importance to every human being, to enquire carefully what are the best and most solid supports and consolations under it; where they are to be found, and how to be secured. Now, the shortest and most effectual way of obtaining satisfaction on these points is, to apply to men of the best judgment, and most experience in the case; to those who have themselves passed through the greatest variety of sufferings, have sought for every possible

* Preached at St. Paul's on the Thanksgiving day, for his Majesty's recovery, April 23, 1789.

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alleviation of them that could be found, and are therefore the best able to decide on the value and the efficacy of the remedies they have actually tried. If we turn our thoughts to men of this description, we shall find few persons better qualified to give us complete information on this head, than the Royal Author of the text before us. He was initiated early in the school of adversity; and though he was afterwards raised, by the hand of Providence, to a throne, yet, in that exalted situation, he experienced a long succession of the severest trials, and the bitterest afflictions, that are incident to human nature. How much he felt on these occasions, is sufficiently evident from his writings, in which he gives vent to the distress and agony of his soul in the strongest and most impassioned language that grief can dictate. Yet with these complaints are mingled generally the warmest expressions of gratitude and thankfulness, for the unspeakable comforts he frequently experienced under these calamities, and the hopes he entertained, not only of being enabled to bear them patiently, but of finally triumphing over them. From whence, then, were these comforts and these hopes derived? This is the great question; the great object of our present inquiry. And the answer to it is in few words. They were derived from TRUST IN GOD. This it was which he declared to be his great refuge in distress, his shield, his rock, his castle, his house of defence, his best and firmest stay under all his various misfortunes. This holy confidence is, indeed, the most striking and prominent feature in his character. It discovers itself in every page of his writings. It sometimes throws a ray of cheerfulness even over his gloomiest moments, and unexpectedly turns his heaviness into joy. "In the Lord put I my "trust," says he, "how say ye then to my soul, that "she should flee as a bird unto the hill? The Lord is "my refuge, and my God is the strength of my con-"fidence. In the multitude of the sorrows that I had "in my heart, thy comforts have refreshed my soul.

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"They that know thy name will put their trust in thee, "for thou, Lord, hast never failed them that seek "thee*." And again, in the words of the text, "O "tarry thou the Lord's leisure; be strong, and he "shall comfort thine heart; and put thou thy trust "in the Lord."

This great example, then, is a powerful recommendation of that sovereign medicine to the afflicted soul, TRUST IN GOD. But does Christianity also encourage us to have recourse to it? And does it promise us the same consolation that the Royal Psalmist derived from it? It promises to us, that if we faithfully serve the great Author and Preserver of our being, he will permit nothing to befal us but what is *upon the whole* beneficial to us, and that "he will make all things "work together for good to them that love him†." He expressly tells us, that "whom he loveth, he "chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he re-"ceiveth‡." Afflictions, therefore, far from being any marks of God's displeasure, are proofs of his kindness to us. They are fatherly corrections, they are friendly admonitions, they are salutary, though unpalatable medicines. They are, in short, instruments in the hands of our Maker, to improve our minds, to rectify our failings, to detach us from the present scene, to fix our affections on things above, and thus form in us that humble and devout temper of mind, and unblemished sanctity of life, which are necessary to qualify us for the great purpose of our creation, the attainment of everlasting happiness in another and a better world.

These considerations are a solid ground for that firm TRUST in the wisdom and the goodness of God, which will be sufficient to support us even when his hand lies heaviest upon us. And we know, in fact, that it *has* supported the greatest and the best of men under the severest pressure of affliction.

But great as this consolation is, our divine Religion has greater still in store for us. We are encouraged to

* Ps. xi. 1. xciv. 22. ix. 10. † Rom. viii. 28. ‡ Heb. xii. 6.

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hope not only for comfort and assistance *under* affliction, but sometimes also for relief, and even deliverance *out* of it. We are commanded "to be careful for nothing; "but in every thing by prayer and supplication to make "our requests known unto God. We are assured, "that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man "availeth much; that the eyes of the Lord are over "the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer; "that godliness is profitable unto all things, having "the promise of the life that now is, and of that which "is to come; and that if we seek first the kingdom of "God, and his righteousness, all other things shall be "added to us*."

But how, says the disputer of this world, can these things be? How is it possible that God should thus interpose in behalf of individuals, or even of nations, without either interrupting the course of nature, or over-ruling the free agency of his rational creatures? Admitting for a moment, this supposed difficulty; who shall presume to say, that the great Governor of the Universe may not, if he sees fit, suspend, or alter, for an instant, those general laws, which he has himself established? Who will venture to affirm, that on great and momentous occasions, which involve the fate, not only of the greatest persons, but of the greatest empires upon earth, he may not, even by extraordinary means, bring about such events, as he sees requisite for the general good?

But these suppositions are unnecessary. There are, undoubtedly, a thousand ways in which the Supreme Lord of all may, without the least violation of the ordinary course of nature, give a new turn to human affairs, and produce unexpectedly, the most disastrous or most beneficial effects. He can render the most regular operations of the material world, and the freest actions of his creatures, subservient to his will; and by the instrumentality of second causes, can accomplish every purpose of his wise and righteous government. He can, for instance, at particular periods, raise up

* Phil. iv. 6. James v. 16. 1 Pet. iii. 12. 1 Tim. iv. 8. Matth. vi. 33.

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persons with dispositions and talents peculiarly adapted to the execution of his designs. He can place them in circumstances and situations, and present to their minds objects and incitements calculated to promote the gracious ends he has in view. He can so dispose, adjust, and combine the common occurrences of life, as to draw from them whatever consequences he thinks fit; and (as almost every day's experience may convince us) he can, by incidents the most trivial, and apparently the most fortuitous, give birth to the most important changes and revolutions on the great theatre of the world.

That by these and various other means (utterly beyond the reach of our conceptions) he both may, and will, whenever he sees it expedient, interpose in the concerns of men; and that he will more particularly sometimes rescue his faithful servants from impending misery and ruin, is so far from being incredible, or even improbable, that it would be injurious to the honor and dignity of his government, it would be repugnant to all our ideas of his moral attributes, and even to the clearest principles of reason and sound philosophy, to suppose the contrary.

It would be preposterous to maintain, that he has so entirely given up the reins of government out of his hands, so irrevokably bound himself by fixt and immutable laws and ordinances, that he can never, in any circumstances, or on any emergency, show himself plainly to be the Sovereign Ruler of the World. That he should thus manifest himself at proper intervals to the sons of men, not only to protect the good, but to awaken the thoughtless from that forgetfulness of him, into which they are but too apt to fall, seems highly requisite, and worthy of him who is the great Lord of the Universe. All ages, and all nations, have concurred in believing such interpositions of the Almighty, and have applied to him on that belief; and Revelation places the doctrine beyond all controversy.

And, thanks be to God, these conclusions of reason, and these promises of Scripture, have been happily con-

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firmed to us by our own repeated experience. There is not a nation upon earth, that has been favored with a greater number of providential deliverances than our own; and there are none of these that are impressed with plainer and more unequivocal marks of a divine interposition, than that which is now the subject of our thanksgivings to Heaven. Incredulity itself has been compelled to own, that the hand of God has been visible on the present occasion; nor is the joy of the nation more universal, than its belief of that great and important truth. But above all the heart of our SOVEREIGN is deeply impressed with this conviction, that IN GOD WAS HIS HELP; and that, to his peculiar blessings on the means used for his recovery, that recovery is to be ascribed. Throughout the whole of his severe trial, his TRUST IN GOD never forsook him: and before that God he now appears in this holy and venerable structure, surrounded with his faithful and affectionate subjects, to offer up in the most public manner, and with a seriousness and a solemnity suited to the occasion, his praises and thanksgivings for those signal mercies, which have been so recently vouchsafed to him, and through him to his whole kingdom. A spectacle more striking, more awful, more dignified, more interesting, more edifying, has scarce ever been presented to the observation of mankind. I know not whether we are to except even that celebrated one recorded in the first book of Kings, where a great and a pious monarch, in the presence of his whole kingdom, prostrated himself before that magnificent edifice, which he had just erected to the honor of his Maker, and then spreading forth his hands towards Heaven, poured out the devout emotions of his soul, in that inimitable prayer delivered down to us in the sacred writings*. This, it must be confessed, was a scene most eminently calculated to raise the soul towards Heaven; to fill it with the sublimest conceptions of the Deity, and to impress it with the liveliest sentiments of veneration, piety, devotion, and

* 1 Kings viii. 23.

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gratitude. And surely effects of a similar nature, and little inferior in degree, may be expected from the present awful solemnity. For though the two occasions are, it must be owned, in some respects dissimilar; though we are not now met to dedicate a TEMPLE to God; yet we are met, I trust, for a still nobler dedication, for the dedication of a WHOLE PEOPLE, with their SOVEREIGN at their head, to their Almighty Protector, their common Benefactor, and Deliverer; for the dedication of ourselves, our souls and bodies, throughout the whole course of our future lives, to his worship, his service, his laws, and his religion. Nothing less than this can be any adequate return to our heavenly Father, for raising up our beloved Sovereign from the bed of sickness, and preserving to us, in his person, every thing that is dear and valuable to us, as Men, as Britons, and as Christians. For how is it possible, on such an occasion as the present, not to remember, or not to acknowledge, the many other invaluable blessings we possess, as well as that which completes and confirms them all, that which we this day commemorate? Are we not as a people blest beyond example, and almost beyond belief? Do we not enjoy the purest mode of worship, the best constituted form of government, the most equal laws, the most able and most upright administration of justice? Are we not perfectly secure in our persons, our properties, our civil and religious liberties? Are not our manufactures flourishing, our population encreasing, our public burdens gradually lessening, our agriculture highly improved, our commerce boundless? Are not the marks of peace, of comfort, of cheerfulness, of affluence, visible on every side; and are not our credit, and reputation abroad, commensurate to our prosperity and happiness at home?

If this be a true picture of our situation, how can we ever express, as we ought, our thankfulness to the gracious Author of all these mercies? It is not the observance, it is not the devotion, however ardent, of a single day, that can be a sufficient evidence of our

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gratitude. The only sure and certain proof of our sincerity, is the reformation of our hearts, and the future holiness of our lives. This is a language which cannot be mistaken; a language which speaks to the senses of mankind, and is sure of being heard and accepted at the Throne of Grace. In the exterior acts of worship, our hearts may not always accompany our lips. We may be lukewarm, inattentive, or insincere. But he, who from a principle of gratitude to Heaven, renounces those favorite sins, which most easily beset him, and devotes himself to the service of his Maker, can never be suspected of pretended sanctity or hypocritical devotion. Here, then, at this solemn hour, and in this sacred place, when we are offering up our thanksgivings to God, let us, at the same time, sacrifice, at the foot of his altar, our vices, our follies, our passionate fondness for diversions, our excessive attachments to any pursuits that tend to draw off our affections from Heaven and heavenly things: and more especially our frequent, our growing profanations of that sacred day which our Maker claims AS HIS OWN; which is the great security and bulwark of our Religion; the great barrier against the inroad of secularity and dissipation; which ought never to be debased by unbecoming levities, by worldly occupations, by dangerous amusements, by any thing, in short, that tends to *desecrate* the Christian Sabbath, to obliterate that mark of discrimination, which divine authority, and primitive usage, have stamped upon it, and to sink it into the common mass of unhallowed days. It is a festival, we own, it is a most joyful festival; but it is a religious one too; and it should be observed, not with intemperate gaiety, nor yet with a gloomy and austere superstition, but with that rational piety, that decent, modest, chastised, and sober cheerfulness, which so well becomes the character of the day; and which (with some exceptions) has, in fact, usually distinguished it in this kingdom. It is a distinction which does honor to us as a people. It is what few other Christian countries can boast. It is

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altogether worthy of the first Protestant Church in Europe; and no reasoning, no ridicule, no false ambition to imitate the freer manners of our neighbors on the continent, should ever induce us to give it up.

But, at the same time, let not external observances constitute the *whole* of our Religion; let us be Christians, not in name and appearance only, but in deed and in truth; and, above all, let us cultivate that heavenly spirit of meekness, gentleness, forbearance, candor, equity and charity, which is the distinguishing character of the Gospel, and which ought to mark distinctly every part of our conduct, both public and private. Let it instantly banish from our hearts "all bitterness, "and wrath, and clamor, and anger, and evil speaking, "with all malice;" and let us become, what we have every reason upon earth to become, a contented, a thankful, a united, a virtuous, a religious people. Let this place be the grave of every unchristian sentiment and passion; let this day be the æra of general harmony and concord. We have met here in joy; let us depart in peace. Let us, both as individuals and as members of the community (for the precept applies to us in *both* capacities) be "kind and tender-hearted one to-"wards another," watchful over ourselves, respectful and dutiful to all our lawful superiors, grateful and obedient to God.

If these be our resolutions respecting our future conduct, we may then safely apply to ourselves that sublime benediction with which Solomon dismissed the people, when the great business of the dedication was closed. "May the Lord our God be with us, as he was "with our fathers; let him not leave us nor forsake "us. That he may incline our hearts unto him, to "walk in all his ways, and to keep his command-"ments, and his statutes, and of his judgments, which "he commanded our fathers. And let these my words, "wherewith I have made supplication before the Lord, "be nigh unto the Lord our God, day and night, that "he may maintain the cause of his servant, and the

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"cause of his people, at all times, as the matter shall "require. That all the people of the earth may know "that the Lord is God, and that there is none else. "Let your heart therefore be perfect with the Lord "our God, to walk in his statutes, and to keep his com-"mandments as at this day*."

* 1 Kings, viii. 57—61.

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SERMON XXXIV.

LUKE x. 41, 42.

Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.

WE are now once more arrived at the commencement of that season*, which the Church of England has set apart for the purpose of enquiring into the state of our account with God, of reviewing our past and present way of thinking and acting with a critical and searching eye; of looking well if there be any way of wickedness in us, of turning from it if there be, of confessing and lamenting our disobedience and ingratitude to our heavenly Father, of imploring his pardon, of entreating the assistance of his holy spirit, and under his guidance forming the most serious resolutions to correct and amend, without delay, whatever we find amiss in our temper, principles, and conduct. This is the true spirit and meaning of the religious solemnity of this day†, and the holy season which follows it; this is the substance and the essence of what is called in Scripture language, and in the epistle we have just heard, "turning to the Lord with weeping, fasting, and "mourning." And what is there in all this, but that sort of solicitude concerning our spiritual condition, and our future prospects, which every man of common

* Lent. † Ash Wednesday.

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sense, if he thinks them worth his notice, must see to be not only highly reasonable, but indispensably necessary? Is there a man who has any important end in view for the advancement of his fame, his fortune, his rank or consequence in life, who does not frequently think and reflect upon it, who does not give up a large share of his time and attention to it, who does not often shut himself up in his closet to consider whether he is in the right road to it, whether he is taking the most efficacious means to accomplish his end? We all know that this, and much more than this, is, and must be done, in such cases. And yet, in a case of infinitely greater moment, we conceive all this care and attention to be perfectly needless. We expect to go to Heaven without so much as giving ourselves the trouble to inquire, at proper intervals, whether we possess the qualifications required of all who are allowed to enter there; whether the course of action we are pursuing will lead us to the point we profess to have in view. The church calls upon us to give up a few hours at stated times, for a few weeks, to those great objects which we all acknowledge to be the most important that can engage the attention of a human being. But the world calls us another way; it calls us a thousand different ways; and which call is it that we obey? Look around and see what it is that occupies, and is likely to occupy, for the next six weeks, the greater part of the inhabitants of this gay and dissipated metropolis. Is it retirement, is it prayer, is it self-examination, is it repentance, is it prostration and humiliation of their souls before God? It is almost preposterous to ask the question. Some, it is true, there are, and, I trust, not a few, that have not yet bowed the knee to Baal; who have not yet fallen down before those idols of sin, of pleasure, of interest, of ambition, which the world has set up to worship; who love God with all their heart, and soul, and mind, and strength; who dedicate not only this day and this season, but a large proportion of every day to his service, and pay an uniform and con-

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stant obedience to his commands. But great numbers, it cannot be denied, (would to God it could) pursue a very different course, and think it meanness to adore the God that made them. Far from rending either their hearts or their garments on such occasions as the present, they treat, with sovereign contempt, every ordinance of the church to which they belong; and this, above all others, they affect not only to despise, but to detest. They cannot bear, it seems, they shudder at the very thought, they cannot bear to draw down imprecations, such as the service of this day contains, on themselves and their neighbors, and to pronounce their own condemnation with their own mouths. Absurd and thoughtless men! Do they, then, imagine, that if these imprecations are not sanctioned by their own lips, they will be of no avail? From whom do they originally proceed? From God himself. They are the terrors, not of man, but of the Lord. And do the threatenings of God want the confirmation of man, before they can take effect? Will not the unmerciful, the drunkard, the extortioner, the fornicator, the adulterer, the murderer, the curser of his father and his mother, will not these, and all the rest of the black catalogue of sinners enumerated this day, receive their due punishment hereafter, if *you* are only so tender-hearted, and so indulgent, as not to pronounce their sentence here? Alas! that sentence is already pronounced by their Almighty Judge. It is recorded in the books of Heaven; and though every tongue on earth were silent, nay, though every tongue should join in glossing over, and even justifying all or any of these crimes, that sentence will assuredly be pronounced on all impenitent offenders. Deceive not, then, yourselves with any such vain imagination, as if any thing you could say, or forbear to say, would alter one iota in the judicial decrees of the Almighty Sovereign of the universe. There is, indeed, one thing that can change them. But that depends not on you, but on the sinner himself. It depends not on what he says, but on what he does. "When the wicked man

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" turneth away from his wickedness that he hath com-
" mitted, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he
" shall save his soul alive*." This is the only way of averting those dreadful maledictions you have this day heard denounced; and it is to bring men to this way, to stamp upon their souls a strong conviction of the danger of sin, and the necessity of a speedy repentance, that our church has thought fit to make use of such strong and impressive terms. It does not, it must be owned, prophesy smooth things. It does not, in a mortal disease, deceive and flatter the patient with soft and soothing palliatives. It tells him what, in his condition, it is highly fitting he should know, the plain truth in plain words. It selects, out of Scripture itself, the most awakening admonitions which that sacred book contains. It makes use of that inspired language which is quick and powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword, which probes our wounds to the bottom, and reaches the most secret maladies of the heart. In fact, almost the whole of the service of this day, which has been so often, and so unjustly censured, is expressed in the very words of Scripture; and whoever thinks fit either to condemn or to ridicule it, is not condemning the English liturgy, but the word of God.

But I am, perhaps, taking up too much of your time in combating this pretended objection to the forms of the day. The real objection, I apprehend, does not lie here. It lies much deeper. When so much pains are taken to find fault with words and phrases taken from holy writ, it creates a strong suspicion, that all is not as it should be in another place. Let us confess the truth. The fault is not in our Common Prayer-books, but in our hearts. " My brethren, if our
" hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence
" towards God†;" then shall we have confidence to look his terrors steadily in the face, and to join, without fear, in the strongest denunciations against sin that the church can prescribe to us. But if our hearts con-

* Ezek. xviii 27. † 1 John, iii. 21.

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demn us, if they reproach us with habitually indulging irregular desires of wealth, of pleasure, or of power, with neglecting or insulting our Maker, and trampling under foot his most sacred laws, no wonder that our lips tremble, and our souls sink within us, while we repeat his awful judgments against such offences. The true way, then to remove all obstacles to a proper intercourse between God and us at this time, and at all times, is to pluck up from our hearts those evil habits, and criminal passions, that bar up our access to the throne of grace. The chief impediments to this intercourse are vice, pleasure, and business. The two first of these I have considered in some former discourses from this place*. The last will be the subject of what I have now to offer to your consideration.

With this view I have chosen the history of the two sisters Martha and Mary; a history with which you are all so perfectly well acquainted, that it is needless to recite the particulars of it. Martha, we know, was so overwhelmed with family cares and embarrassments, so immoderately anxious to provide an entertainment worthy of her illustrious guest, so *cumbered*, as our version very energetically expresses it, *with much serving*, that, like many others engaged in the bustle of active life, she conceived the business she was employed in to be the most important of all human concerns. She fancied that every thing else ought to give way to it, and that her sister Mary was most miserably wasting her time by sitting at the feet of Jesus, and listening to his heavenly conversation. How astonished, then, and mortified must she be, when, on calling out for her sister to help her, she received from our Lord, that well-known reproof, mingled, however, with the most affectionate and salutary advice to her, and to all those that happen to entertain similar sentiments, and to be in similar circumstances, with herself. "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things, "but one thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen that "good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

* See Sermons 14 and 31.

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The one thing needful, then, we see, is an earnest desire of spiritual instruction and spiritual improvement, or, in other words, a serious and constant regard to our everlasting welfare.

But how few are there, in comparison, who uniformly act on these principles; and what multitudes, on the contrary, are there who are so completely entangled in the various occupations of a busy and a tumultuous life, that, they are, like Martha, much more disposed to cry out for help in their worldly employments, than to take away any part of their attention from them to bestow on the concerns of another life.

That the pursuits these people are engaged in may be both important and necessary, I mean not to controvert or deny; but the question, then, is, which is *most* important and *most* necessary, the business of this life, or the business of the next. If our temporal and spiritual interests happen to interfere, we are not, I think, any where commanded to give the preference to our worldly concerns. It may be said, perhaps, that it would be very ridiculous to sit still, and leave our temporal affairs to Providence, expecting that God should feed and clothe us, as he feeds the fowls of the air, and clothes the lilies of the field. But it would, I am sure, be more ridiculous, and *much* more dangerous, to leave our spiritual welfare to God, that we might, in the mean while, carry on our worldly business without interruption. We have abundantly more reason to hope, that life may be supported without incessant toil and drudgery, than that we should arrive at heaven without setting one foot forwards ourselves in the way that leads to it. We are told by Christ himself, that if we seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, all those things (that are really necessary) shall be added unto us*. But we are no where told, that if we seek first the things of this world, the kingdom of God, and all its immortal glories, shall be thrown into our hands, without any efforts on our part to obtain them. Eternal life, and endless felicity, are not things of such very

* Matth. vi. 33.

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small consequence as to be given us gratuitously over and above what we can acquire in this world, by bestowing our whole attention upon it.

Let it be remembered, too, when we are comparing this life and the next, that in pursuit of our present interests, be our industry ever so great, we may chance to fail of success. The most indefatigable worldling that ever lived, may, after all his drudgery, be disappointed of his aim; may, by a thousand accidents not in his power to foresee, or prevent, be deprived of the fruits of his labors, or rendered incapable of enjoying them. And when he has lost this world, he has lost every thing. He has no share or inheritance in the next. He has taken no pains concerning it, and can therefore expect nothing from it. He can draw from it no support or consolation under the loss he has sustained. Whereas the truly devout and religious man has no reason to be in any pain about his temporal affairs. If they succeed, it is very well; it is so much clear gains: he has only given them a second place in his thoughts, he has lost nothing for the sake of them; his condition, in this life, is so much the better; his prospects hereafter not at all the worse. If his views here are frustrated, he has something to comfort him; he has secured a happiness in reversion which cannot be taken away from him; he is not afraid of any evil tidings, for his heart standeth fast and believeth in the Lord. Nay, even supposing the very worst that can happen; supposing he should, by his attention to Religion, be reduced to the most deplorable condition that can befal mortality, so as that the body should perish, whilst he is consulting the health of his soul; the only consequence of this last and most grievous calamity would be, to put him in immediate possession of that treasure, which he had been so industriously laying up in heaven. But if the man of business, on the contrary, whilst he is heaping together the good things of this world, should receive his final summons to another, it then behoves him to consider not only "whose those "things shall be which he has provided," but what

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the lot of his soul shall be for which nothing is provided. It is a serious, it is an alarming consideration, to be summoned unexpectedly to answer for his conduct, without having once examined it; to enter upon a state of eternity, without the least preparation made for it. Yet such is but too often the case of that infatuated man, who (as it is expressed in the parable) layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God; who, in the foolish security of his heart, says to his soul, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for "many years, take thine ease, eat drink, and be mer-"ry." But in the very midst of this his senseless confidence, and visionary plans of future happiness, he is snatched away with that deserved and dreadful taunt, (the prelude only of something still more dreadful) "thou "fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee*."

If, then, either our temporal or spiritual interests must be entirely neglected for the sake of advancing the other, there can be no doubt which ought to give place. But the truth is, they are both perfectly consistent, and may, with the utmost ease, be carried on very amicably together. The Scripture no where forbids us to make a comfortable provision for ourselves, our families, and our friends: on the contrary, it enjoins it. What it condemns, is only such an intemperate pursuit of worldly things, as is destructive of all Religion, and not such a prudent and moderate regard to them as the calls of nature, of justice, and of humanity, demand. These calls must be properly attended to, these duties must be fulfilled, to render us capable of any others; and all the Gospel requires is, that they should be made subservient to our everlasting happiness.

It is true, that some men must necessarily, from their indigence in private, or their elevation in public life, be more involved in cares than the rest of the world. But still we may, in the busiest scenes, find certain breaks and intervals, or if we do not *find*, we ought to *make* them, which eagerly seized, and pro-

* Luke xii. 20.

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perly applied, will, through the merits of our Redeemer, make our final calling and election sure.

Some of the most essential duties of Religion consume no time at all. To keep ourselves unspotted from the world, to abstain from intemperance and sensuality, from falsehood and detraction, to do no injury to our neighbor, to suppress all anger, malice, and revenge, does not, in any degree, interfere with our usual occupations. We may do a kind action just as easily and expeditiously as we can do a cruel one; nay, generally, with infinitely less pain and trouble to ourselves; and, by a charitable donation judiciously bestowed, we may make a fellow-creature happy in an instant, without the least interruption to business. By selecting the best and worthiest men for the management of our concerns, we may give countenance to virtue, and fix a brand upon vice. By renouncing all the secret craft of the world, and all the sinister, though not unusual, methods of accumulating wealth, we may give the strongest proofs of our integrity. By contenting ourselves with the reasonable emoluments of our professions, and our employments, we may make our moderation known unto all men. By refusing to take advantage of public scarcity and distress, and disdaining to raise ourselves on the ruin of our fellow creatures, we may display to the whole world a generous and disinterested love of our country. We may, in short, by a thousand instances of this kind, "make to ourselves "friends of the mammon of unrighteousness," and whether we eat, or drink, or work, or whatever we do, may do it all in such a manner as to promote the glory of God, and the salvation of our own souls.

Then, as to the positive duties of Religion, and the offices of piety and devotion, we can all of us spare one day in seven, at least, for the performance of them. By this we lose no ground in the race for riches and honors, because most of our competitors lose equally; and they who spend it in idleness and debauchery lose more. We can all of us snatch a little time at morning, and at evening, and at noon-day, for conversing

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with our Maker and ourselves. We can all of us, in the very midst of our hurry, send up a short prayer, or a silent ejaculation to the throne of grace; whilst our hands are employed, our hearts may be with God; whilst our conversation is on earth, our thoughts and affections may be in heaven. No man, in short, can possibly, except by his own fault, be so circumstanced as to want the time that is indispensably necessary for working out his salvation. In cases of necessity, we must do what we can when we cannot do all we wish. We are sometimes obliged to give up to business part of the time allotted for the refreshment of our bodies; but still we take care to give them what is absolutely necessary for their support. In the same manner, though we cannot always indulge ourselves in long and regular exercises of piety and devotion yet should we never fail to feed and keep alive, at least, our sense of Religion by occasional supplies of spiritual nourishment. Such transient refreshments are often the sweetest, because we come to them with an appetite, and more will be sometimes done in them by men of quickness and dispatch, than in whole years languished out by the monastic drone in solitude and indolence.

But instead of making use of every opportunity that offers; instead of conforming to those occasional seasons of retirement which the church has thrown in their way, men of business are apt to deceive themselves with resolutions of retreating some time or other from the world in order to give themselves up to God and Religion without interruption. Under this persuasion, they postpone the settlement of their accounts with Heaven, till the wished-for time arrives, when they shall have nothing else to engage their thoughts. This is an error so very common, even to men of the best sense and the best intentions, that it well deserves a moment's consideration, before we dismiss this subject.

And yet, it is very surprising, that so many should fall into this snare, when every one may see, from dai-

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ly experience, that these resolutions are scarce ever effectually carried into execution. And, indeed, how can it be expected? It is the very nature of worldly pursuits to draw us on insensibly from one thing to another, contrary to our conviction, and even sometimes contrary to our inclination.

The ambitious man reaches what he thinks the summit of his wishes; but this summit, when gained, he finds will serve as a step to some higher point, which makes his present situation seem little in his eyes. As he rises higher, he sees clearer and further; he condemns his first contracted views, and enlarges his desires as his prospects open. It is the same in the accumulation of wealth, as in the acquisition of power. There is always a certain sum we wish to compass, a certain design we wish to accomplish. That design is accomplished, but our wishes are not completed. By thus having our eyes constantly fixed on some distant object, they are perpetually taken off from ourselves, and we never want a reason for neglecting our duty, till it becomes too late to think of it.

Let me not, however, be understood as meaning by this to discourage in men of the world a real desire of breaking away from the incumbrance of business, and dedicating themselves in earnest to the service of God and the duties of Religion. I mean only to caution them against delusive and abortive projects of this nature; against trusting all their hopes of future acceptance to distant and visionary plans of retirement, and, in the mean time, living without God in the world. This is a risque to which no wise man ought to expose his most important interests. But if you sincerely wish to disengage yourself, at a convenient opportunity, from the cares and toils of a laborious occupation, think a little of the shortness and uncertainty of life, and the danger of long procrastination. Let the period of your retreat be fixed in due time, and resolutely observed; and let it not be delayed from day to day, till your health, and spirits, and vigor of mind and body, are gone; and all taste and relish for serious reflections,

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and heavenly meditations, are utterly extinguished in your breast. To prevent this, you must give up the world, before the world gives up you; you must be decisive and immoveable in the plan you have formed, and the time you have marked out for its execution; and in the mean while, in the very midst of your business, you must preserve some intercourse with your Maker, "some communion with your own heart." You must seize with eagerness, and employ with alacrity, the few moments you have to spare from business, in cultivating devout sentiments and virtuous habits, and sowing silently and imperceptibly, in your soul, the seeds of eternal life. You will then be prepared for the true enjoyment of a religious retreat; you will feel nothing of that vacancy and languor, that disappointment and regret, which retirement frequently produces in minds long debased by low cares and sordid pursuits, and which have brought the thing itself into disgrace and contempt. You will, on the contrary, find full employment in cultivating and bringing to maturity the good seed that has already begun to spring up in your heart, and will be continually acquiring greater strength of mind, greater firmness of principle, greater uniformity of practice. Having already made yourself *acquainted* with God, you will feel yourself no stranger in his presence, but will, with humble confidence, commit yourself, and all your concerns, to his gracious guidance and protection. You will have leisure to improve your intercourse with him by frequent prayer, and to contemplate his power, his wisdom, his goodness, in his astonishing works of creation and redemption, in his providential care of the universe, in his daily mercies to yourself in particular.

By meditations such as these, you will find an ardent love of God kindling in your soul. Your mind will gradually detach itself from the present scene, and raise itself to Heaven and heavenly things. Your passions will become every day more tranquil and composed; your affections more spiritual and refined; your

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thoughts more elevated; your prospects more noble and exhilirating: and the peace, the comfort, the delight, you will experience in a retirement such as this, can only be exceeded by those pure, celestial joys hereafter, to which they will be a prelude and an introduction.

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SERMON XXXV.

PROVERBS iii. 27.

Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it.

WHEN we reflect on that general turn to acts of charity and humanity which is so observable in this country, it may perhaps appear perfectly needless to recommend to our hearers the injunction contained in the text. If they are so well disposed, as it should seem they are, to do good, to what purpose are they exhorted not to withhold it from them to whom it is due? And, indeed, if there was no other way of doing good but that of relieving the indigent, there would not often, it must be owned, be much occasion to urge the practice of this duty. But we must not flatter ourselves, that when we have distributed to the necessitous all the wealth we can spare, we have done every thing that the love of our neighbor requires at our hands. At the best, we have only performed one part, and that a small part, of the great, the ROYAL LAW*, (as it is called) of CHRISTIAN CHARITY, which involves a great variety of most important and useful acts of kindness to our fellow-creatures. Several of these, though extremely easy and obvious, are, for that very reason, perhaps, apt to be overlooked. Some of them, therefore, I shall beg leave, at present, to suggest to your thoughts, from whence the two following good

* James ii. 8.

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consequences, among others may arise. The great and the wealthy will see, that to be truly benevolent, something more is necessary than liberality to the poor. And they who are in a humbler station of life, and who on that account are apt to lament their inability to do good, will find that there are many roads to beneficence still open to them; and that scarce any one, however low or indigent, can want *opportunities* of doing good, if he will but honestly make use of them.

I. First, then, there is a negative kind of benevolence, which it is most certainly in every man's power to exercise if he pleases; and that is, ABSTINENCE FROM MISCHIEF. As the first step towards wisdom is to avoid error, and towards happiness to feel no pain, so the first advance towards benevolence is to do no harm. It may seem, perhaps, a great impropriety of expression to dignify this with the name of benevolence. But if benevolence consists, as it certainly does, in contributing to the comfort and happiness of our fellow-creatures, there is not any one act of humanity, that will operate so effectually and extensively to this end, as refraining from every thing that can offend, distress or injure others. By far the greatest part of the misery we see in the world, arises not so much from omitting acts of kindness, as from committing acts of unkindness, and cruelty; and were all these to cease at once, the effect on the general happiness of mankind would be somewhat similar to that inexpressible comfort we experience in ourselves on the removal of some violent pain. Think only what infinite mischief arises from peevishness, ill-nature, and pride; from detraction, falsehood, deceit, and treachery; from fraud and oppression; from envy, hatred, anger, lust, ambition, revenge, and the whole infernal family of malevolent passions. Annihilate all the evils that arise from these sources, and this world would be a paradise. Every other kind of charity would be almost unnecessary. For it is the chief business of human compassion, to heal those wounds which human malignity is constantly inflicting. How much, then, is it to be lamented,

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that this most important branch of charity is not more attended to, than it seems to be! There is no one character in the world, which men are in general so ambitious of having ascribed to them, as that of good-nature and benevolence. With some (especially those that reject Christianity, but profess themselves friends to virtue) this is deemed not merely the first of human duties; but the only one worth their notice; the one thing needful, the sum and substance of all morality and religion. One should naturally suppose, therefore, that this virtue at least, this favorite and fashionable virtue, would be perfectly well understood and practised, and every the minutest branch of it most assiduously cultivated and improved. But how far this is from being the case, is but too apparent. The common pretence to it is seldom any thing more than a little constitutional easiness of temper, a sociability of disposition, and a thoughtless, indiscriminate, perhaps even pernicious liberality. On these grounds do great numbers fancy themselves the kindest, the gentlest, the most benevolent of human beings. And yet, at the same time, these men of benevolence will not scruple, perhaps, where their own interest is concerned, to oppress and harass their inferiors without the least feelings of compassion or remorse, to invade their dearest rights, disregard their most equitable claims, distress them with expensive and tedious litigations, and crush them with the weight of their wealth and power. If envy or ambition, if prejudice or party, if spleen or resentment, inflame their minds, they will say sometimes the bitterest and the cruellest things of those whom they happen to dislike, will calumniate the fairest and most unblemished characters, will misrepresent the best intentioned actions and designs, and give way to such a vehemence of temper and conduct as is utterly inconsistent with all true benevolence. If softer passions take possession of them, these they will often indulge to the very utmost, let what will be the consequence, let who will be the sufferer. The dignity of virtuous innocence, the peace and comfort of families,

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the ties of friendship, the laws of hospitality, the sanctity of plighted vows, the happiness of those whom they are bound by the most solemn engagements to cherish and to protect, all these, and a thousand other no less sacred obligations, are trifles to them, are brushed away like the morning dew, when they stand in the way of their desires; and multitudes must be made wretched for ever, that they may be triumphant for one moment. And yet, if the slightest injury or insult be offered to themselves, they take fire in an instant; they pursue the offender with inextinguishable fury and rancor, and, whilst they are violating every hour the maxims of true honor, will sacrifice to notions of false honor the life of the dearest friend they have in the world. Let not these, let not any such as these, ever pretend to talk of humanity or benevolence. They are ignorant of its first principles, and have the very rudiments of true Christian charity yet to learn. Tho' to some persons, and on some occasions, they may perhaps be generous and kind; yet if they are dissolute, oppressive, implacable, vindictive, the misery they occasion by these vices will infinitely outweigh all the good they do in other instances, and justly denominate them hard-hearted and inhuman.

II. The very first duty, then, of the benevolent man, is to do harm to no one. Then let him go on to do good to as many as he can. And he *may* do good to more persons, and in more cases, than he is perhaps aware of. What numberless opportunities, for instance, are there of making others happy in the daily commerce of life (especially in its nearest and tenderest connections) by an easy, affable, condescending, gentle, encouraging behavior and conversation. We may say and do the most trivial things, in such a manner as to give almost as much pleasure to those with whom we constantly live and converse, as we could do by the most substantial acts of kindness. And let not this be thought unworthy the attention of a Christian assembly. Scripture itself commands us *to be courteous**,

* 1 Pet. iii. 8.

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and the manners of our blessed Lord were not only mild and gentle, but graceful and captivating. This was the natural result of his unbounded benevolence, which is indeed the best, the only sure and solid foundation of true URBANITY. Without real, undissembled good-will to others, either from principle or constitution, there can be no such thing as a constant desire to please; and without such a desire always present to our minds, it is impossible we *should* please. Whoever, therefore, wishes to render himself universally beloved and admired, must not merely *seem* benevolent; he must be really so. When once he is, every thing else will generally follow of course, without difficulty, without effort, with the least occasion for art, disguise, or management*. When all is goodness within, all must be gracious and engaging without. When there is a fountain of genuine kindness in the soul, it will naturally and spontaneously diffuse itself to every the minutest part of our behavior.

III. They who have had much experience in the world, may be of infinite use to those who have had but little, by giving them wise, and seasonable, and salutary advice; by rectifying their crude mistaken notions of men and things; by instructing them in the real value of the blessings and the evils both of this life and the next; by pointing out to them the road they are to take, the objects they are to pursue; by guarding them against those hasty friendships, and ruinous connections, which they are but too apt to form; by teaching them, in fine, to distinguish properly between trivial, showy, superficial accomplishments, and those solid, substantial attainments, both intellectual, moral, and religious, which ought to engage the chief attention of a rational and immortal being. This world is a wide and turbulent ocean, full of rocks and shoals; and there cannot be a kinder or more useful thing than to furnish those who are ready to launch out upon it with a proper chart and compass to direct their course. There are few persons who have not, in some part of

* Such as we see recommended in the letters of a late noble Earl to his Son.

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their lives, abundant opportunities of exercising their benevolence and good-nature, in this way, towards the thoughtless and inexperienced. And they must have little feeling indeed, who can see a poor giddy wretch running headlong down a precipice, without stretching out a friendly hand to snatch him from destruction.

IV. But if we are afraid of being thought meddling and officious, and of provoking enmity, where friendship only was meant, there is another method of instructing and benefiting others, which cannot possibly give offence; and that is, A GOOD EXAMPLE. A regular, virtuous, religious life, besides all the good it does in other respects, is a constant lesson of morality to all around us. It is a silent, insinuating kind of advice, which steals unobserved into the mind; and its operations, though imperceptible, are commonly most effectual. Living under the influence of a bright example is to the soul, what breathing a pure and wholesome air is to the body. We find ourselves mended and improved and invigorated by both, without any sensible impression made upon us, without perceiving how the happy change is brought about. When people offer us advice in form, it seems to argue a kind of superiority which sometimes piques and offends us. We are apt to set ourselves, out of mere pride, to fence and fight against it, and can scarce ever be ingenuous enough to own ourselves in the wrong when any one *presumes* to tell us that we are so. But we cannot possibly be angry at a man for taking care of his own conduct, for going on in the right road himself, and leaving us to follow him or not, as we think fit. When virtue is thus made vissible in human form, its charms are too powerful to be resisted. Instead of applying to the understanding, it makes its way directly to the heart; and when that is once gained over, all difficulty is at an end. Here then, is a way of doing good, which is equally in the power of the greatest man and the meanest. He has nothing to do but to go quietly on in the path of duty, and he will be followed by multitudes,

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on whom neither argument, nor persuation, would ever have made the slightest impression.

But though every one may thus make his light shine most usefully before men, yet the higher this light is placed, the wider will be its sphere, and the more extensive its influence. They therefore, who by their birth, their station, their power, their wealth, their profession, their abilities, are set, as it were, upon an eminence, and held up to the observation of the world, are more especially bound to take heed to their ways, since the good or the harm they may do by their conduct is inconceivable. It is very well known, that the lower orders of men almost constantly take the cast and color of their lives from those above them. The manners of the people, therefore, are to a great degree in the hands of their superiors, and may be moulded by them into whatever form they please. What a noble opportunity of doing good does this afford to those superiors! An opportunity which to every man of benevolence, of public spirit, nay, even of any honest ambition, must be such a *temptation* to right conduct, as one would think it impossible for him to withstand. What a fair and obvious path to reputation and applause is here marked out to the upper part of the world! How easy is it for them to merit, and to obtain, a place amongst the most distinguished friends and benefactors of mankind, *merely by living as they ought*; by being as eminently good, as they are eminently great. There are it must be confessed, numbers who are really so; and were those numbers to encrease in the proportion they might and ought, we should soon see the infinite utility of such examples. It is an experiment that well deserves to be tried in its utmost extent, and the reward would amply repay the labor. For surely there is no gratification that wealth or power can bestow, equal to the feelings which THEY must have, who see multitudes of their fellow-creatures growing every day better and happier under their hands. It can be exceeded only by the unspeakable joy they will experience hereafter, when they perceive themselves

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surrounded in the realms of light by those who have been brought there principally by their means; whose grateful transports will overwhelm them with delight, and for whose virtues they will be rewarded as well as for their own.

V. Another very easy and unexpensive method of being very serviceable to others is, by vindicating the characters of those that have been unjustly defamed and traduced. If the injured persons are strangers to us, it is generous and noble to stand up in their defence. If they are our friends, we are bound by the most sacred ties to repel the insults offered to their good name. If they are set in authority over us, it is our duty to rescue them from the obloquy which we know they do not merit. In all these respects we have, it must be owned at present, an ample field for our benevolence to work in. With opportunities of doing good in *this* way, we are, indeed, most liberally furnished by the licence and malevolence of the age. For surely it is doing it no injustice to say, that one of its most distinguishing features is an intemperance in calumny, an indiscriminate wantonness of defamation, of which no other country, no other period, even in this country, furnishes any example. It becomes, then, every friend to humanity, or even to common justice, to set himself with the utmost earnestness against this most unchristian fury of detraction. He can hardly do a greater kindness to individuals, or a more substantial service to the public, than by discouraging and repressing to the utmost every groundless slander, every unmerited reproach, let who will be the object, whether in the highest employments or the most private stations of life.

VI. But though in these and many other instances that might be mentioned, we may do most essential service to our fellow-creatures, yet they who have the strongest claim on our benevolence, are undoubtedly the afflicted and distressed. To these, when pecuniary relief is all they want, it should certainly be administered in proportion to their necessities, to our circum-

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stances, and the right they have to expect assistance from us. But it frequently happens, that the kindness they stand in need of is of a very different nature. Sometimes they require nothing more than a little support and countenance against some petty tyrant, that "deviseth mischief continually*." Sometimes they have undeservedly lost the affections of their best friend, whom they wish to regain. Sometimes they seek in vain admission to those who can alone effectually assist them. Sometimes a load of grief lies heavy on their minds, which calls for some compassionate hand to lighten or remove it, by consolation, by advice, by encouragement, by sympathy and condolence, by every tender care, every soothing expression that humanity can dictate. In all these cases, and a multitude of others that might be mentioned, true benevolence will accommodate itself to the various distresses that fall in its way; will, with a versatility truly admirable, "become all things to all men," and assume as many different shapes as there are modes of misery in the world. It will compose the differences of friends; it will arrest the violence of enemies; it will bring back the ungrateful child to a sense of his duty, the offended parent to the feelings of affection; "it will visit "the fatherless and widows in their affliction; it will "rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them "that weep;" it will protect the helpless and the weak; will exert its influence, will exhaust its powers in redressing their injuries, and vindicating their rights; it will facilitate their access to the seats of justice; it will knock for them at the doors of the great; it will raise them up friends, where they could never have thought of looking for them; it will be as Aaron was to Moses, "a mouth to them†;" it will speak those wants which they are unable to represent, and plead for them with an eloquence which nothing can resist. The man of charity, in short, will not merely content himself with giving alms; he will give what people are often more unwilling to give, his attention, his thoughts, his care,

* Proverbs vi. 14. † Ex. iv. 16.

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his friendship, his protection. These are so many instruments of beneficence that God puts into our hands for the benefit of others. These were intended to supply the place of wealth; and will, in many cases, relieve distresses which wealth cannot reach.

To enter into a minute detail of all the various ways in which we may benefit mankind would be endless, and, indeed, in a great measure needless. For whoever is possessed with a sincere desire to do good, will have no occasion for a monitor to suggest to him when and where he shall exert it. He will be no less quick in discerning, than eager in embracing every opportunity of exercising his benevolence. I shall therefore content myself with mentioning in conclusion, only one more way of manifesting our good will to mankind; which is in a very high degree important and beneficial; which lies as much within the reach of the lowest as the highest; and which yet both high and low are, I fear, but too apt to neglect; I mean, RECOMMENDING OUR BRETHREN TO GOD IN PRAYER.

Let not the Philosopher smile at this! It is not to him I speak. HE, I know, is infinitely above the meanness of paying any homage to the great Creator and Governor of the world. He disdains to pray even for his own welfare; how, then should he ever think of imploring blessings upon others? How can he be expected to love his neighbor better than himself! He laughs at the idea of a particular providence, which regulates the minutest movements both of the natural and the moral world, and consequently looks on prayer as the idlest and most useless employment in which a human creature can be engaged. Let us leave him, then, to the enjoyment of that comfortable state of which he has made choice; turned adrift (as he must suppose himself) into a wide world, and abandoned to the caprice of chance and fortune, without protector, guide, or comforter; without any Almighty Friend to apply to for himself, or those he holds most dear, when exposed to dangers, or involved in calamities, where all human help is vain. Here, I say, let us leave him;

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and let us devoutly thank God that we are not Philosophers. Let us thank God that our belief of this most important doctrine of a particular providence is founded, not on the cobweb subtleties of human science, but on that solid, immoveable rock, the Gospel of Christ.

The Scripture informs us, that he who first created the world, still continues to preserve it; that he is "about our path and about our bed, and spieth out all "our ways*;" that, without his knowledge not a "sparrow falls to the ground, and that the very hairs "of our head are all numbered†." To this gracious and Almighty Being we are commanded to pray, and that not only for ourselves but for others also. "Pray "one for another," says St. James. "Let supplica- "tion, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be "made for all men‡." "Seek the peace of the city "where you live, and pray unto the Lord for it‖." What a pleasing, what a spacious field of benevolence is here opened to the Christian, from which the unbeliever (who yet, of all others, boasts the most of his benevolence) absolutely shuts himself out. We think it a strong mark of our regard, to recommend those we love to some great and powerful friend, who is able to support and advance them in the world. But what earthly support or protection is to be compared to HIS, who has all the powers of nature, and all the events of futurity, at his command, who has the hearts of all men in his hand, and "turneth them whithersoever he "will§." What a privilege, what an honor, what an indulgence is it, that we are *allowed* to commit those we love to his care and guardianship; and that we can do it without raising up a rival in his affections! In the arms of his mercy there is room for all. He can embrace in them, at once, the whole race of mankind; and the more we intercede in our prayers for others, the surer are we of his kindness to ourselves. To him we seldom fail to have recourse in our own distress. There are cases in which we fly to him by a kind of

* Psalm cxxxix. 3. † Matth. x. 29. 30. ‡ 1 Tim. ii. 1.
‖ Jer. xxix 7. § Prov. xxi. 1.

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instinctive impulse; in which without the utmost violence, we cannot *restrain* ourselves from prayer. If then we have any real good will to our fellow-creatures, we shall implore the same mercies, and with the same earnestness, for them that we do for ourselves. If we have any love for our country, we shall not fail to give it a place in our devotions, and to pray most ardently for the prosperity and stability of our Jerusalem.

In what manner our prayers can be granted, or by what means God can avert calamity from those we recommend to his protection, without doing violence to what is called the ordinary course of nature, it is no concern of ours to enquire. If God has commanded us to pray for others, it is our business not to philosophize, but to obey. Let us give ourselves no trouble about the course of nature. It is perfectly safe in the hands of its divine Author. There may be no difficulties to Omnipotence, where we see nothing but impossibilities. Let us leave God to manage his own world, and perform his promises, as he certainly will, in his own way. All we have to do is, to make a faithful use of that valuable privilege of INTERCESSION, which he has graciously allowed us for the benefit of our fellow-creatures. The most indigent man may say to his neighbor, as St. Peter did to the cripple at the gate of the temple, "silver and "gold have I none; but such as I have, give I thee*." My wishes, my intercessions, my prayers you shall have. On earth, indeed, I can do nothing; but I will try to move HEAVEN in your favor. This puts it in the power of the meanest member of society, if he is but religious and devout, to be as essentially useful, both to individuals and to the community, as those that fill the highest and most active stations of life. From the deepest solitute, and from the humblest cell, his prayers may reach the throne of God; may there touch one of those celestial springs that set the world in motion; may be among the reasons that induce the Almighty to give a new turn to the great

* Acts iii. 6.

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wheels of the universe, and to rescue individuals, families, and empires, from destruction. Improbable, and even ridiculous, as this may seem to the profound reasoners of this world, the Scriptures, both of the Old and New Testament, are full of the powerful prevalence and astonishing effects of prayer; and unless we absolutely renounce all [redacted] the Gospel, and all confidence in the promises of Christ, we must admit the truth of this doctrine; we must acknowledge, that "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man," either for himself, or for others, "availeth much*."

Let then, every sincere Christian, unmoved by the cavils of the sophist, or the insults of the scorner, steadily and resolutely persevere in that most benevolent office of INTERCEDING for all mankind. Let him beseech the great Sovereign of the Universe to enlighten the ignorant, to strengthen the weak, to confirm the doubtful, to convert the infidel, to reclaim the profligate, to soften the unmerciful, to restrain the violent and vindictive, to redress the injured and oppressed, to protect the innocent; to reconcile the interests and calm the passions of contending individuals and hostile nations; to avert from this hitherto favored land those bitter evils with which other countries are now so cruelly desolated and overwhelmed; to direct the councils and prosper the just designs of those whom Providence has set over us; to unite the hearts of those they govern, as the heart of one man, in sentiments of Christian charity, and constitutional obedience. Let him implore, in fine, (as he naturally will) the pecular blessing of the Almighty on those he holds most dear; that, as our Liturgy very sublimely expresses it, "through his most mighty protection, "both here and ever, they may be preserved both in "body and soul; and that he being their ruler and "guide, they may so pass through things temporal as "finally to lose not the things that are eternal."

* James v. 16.

FINIS.

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